

Christ the King

If you have ever wondered why bad things happen to good people; if you have ever been victimized or felt lost or abandoned or betrayed; then you have a friend in Jesus. Today we celebrate the Feast Day known as Christ the King. And perhaps you were as surprised as I that our gospel reading is not one of the victorious Jesus, coming out of the tomb; it is not Jesus ascending into heaven; it is not even the Jesus who healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, who raised the dead. No.

The King we gather to worship is nailed to his throne; stripped naked; laughed at, mocked, abandoned not only by his friends, but seemingly by God as well. Pontius Pilate ordered that the sign be posted above his head on the cross. A sign written in three languages. A sign that the religious leaders found outrageous. The sign read, in Latin, Greek and Aramaic: "The King of the Jews."

You can almost hear Pilate snickering to himself, thinking about his sign; to him, a stroke of sarcastic genius. And yet, echoing in the background of the horrifying sight of Jesus nailed to his throne; of the agonizing death of the best man who ever lived; is this truth about this King. And this truth reaches through the centuries to everyone who has ever suffered or felt abandoned or betrayed:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created. ***** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." Col 1:13.

Jesus, nailed to his throne, the very image of the invisible God.

What does that say to us about who God is? No one in their right mind would invent such a God! How do we come to grips with a God who reveals himself in utter weakness? What can we say to a God who refuses to exact revenge? A God who refuses to fight? A God who loves us to death, to the death of his son?

In your pain and mine, these are the questions to ponder, the questions to wrestle with; and ultimately, the questions that lead to salvation.

This feast day of Christ the King began only in 1925. It is a new feast day in the 2000 year history of the church. Pope Pius IX began this feast day. In 1925, Mussolini was on the rise in Italy. A rabble rouser named Adolf Hitler was making waves in Germany. A world-wide depression was right around the corner.

Even today, as we claw our way out of a near economic collapse, as unemployment is at record highs, as two wars rage and as uncertainty abounds, we too celebrate the feast of Christ the King.

Even today, in the midst of the tragedy of 10 year old Patreace with brain cancer, of all of the struggles we each of us endure, we celebrate the feast of Christ the King.

Christ the King is God's: "And yet," to the world's pain and loss and uncertainty. The world is full of pain and loss and uncertainty.

And yet,

"He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him, all things in heaven and on earth were created. *** For in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."

God meets us not with parades and winning lottery tickets. God meets us quietly; in the very midst of uncertainty; at the very center of our pain. It is in gentleness and understanding that God come under your roof, and sits in your chair, and waits.

Such is the King, nailed to his throne.

He has many witnesses today, some who are Christian, and others who are not. Listen to one of them:

"I have no enemies and no hatred. None of the police who monitored, arrested, and interrogated me, none of the prosecutors who indicted me, and none of the judges who judged me are my enemies. Hatred can rot away at a person's intelligence and conscience. That is why I hope to be able to transcend my personal experiences as I look upon our nation's development and social change, to counter the regime's hostility with utmost good will, and to dispel hatred with love."

So said Liu Xiaobo, the imprisoned Chinese writer who received this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

He didn't say these words when he learned he had received the award. No, he said these words in the Chinese court, in 2009, at his sentencing for "inciting subversion of the state." He was sentenced to 11 years.

We each of us remember well that unknown man who blocked, with his fragile body, the steel and bullets of that massive tank at Tianamen Square. Each time that tank moved forward, the man stepped in front of it. In that moment, the fragility of hope overpowered the might of oppression.

Yes, the Lord has many witnesses in the world today. Some are Christian, others are not. But it means that God is alive in all the world. God is alive in your life, and mine, and in the lives of all human beings.

Christ the King, nailed to his throne; Christ the King, the very image of the invisible God; pleads with us to see what is real in an entirely new way.

Our day to day reality is competition, it is domination, it is control, it is doing the utmost to be safe. At a personal level, this way of living life leads to stress, to ulcers, to anger and to anxiety.

At a national level, it leads to a shocking inequality of wealth; to near strip searches as one boards a plane; to the waste of precious resources, and the exploitation of a vast number of people. Jesus, the King, invites us into a new way.

Jesus invites us into a community of people who are reconciled with one another: who live with an abiding trust in this God who gave his life for us, and who has promised to rescue us from the grave.

It has been said: "A person can choose only within the world she can see." Christ the King, nailed to his throne, invites us into God's world; that strange place where weakness is the path to victory; where forgiveness conquers hate; where death is the portal to new life.

Can we trust this strange God who will stop at nothing to have us? Hear again who Jesus is, and decide:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created. In him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."

+amen.