

## Christ the King - 2017

Ezekiel 34:11-12,15-17; PS 23; 1 Cor 15: 20-26,28; Matt 25:31-46

What do you think of when someone mentions a king or queen? Do you picture someone sitting on a throne dressed in expensive robes? Do you see a strange or crazy person being taken care of by servants? Do you picture a strong and decisive ruler? Do you see a figure head with no real power? Do you see someone running around shouting “Off with his head!”? We have our own images of what it means to be royal ruler. Today we celebrate the feast of “Jesus Christ, King of the Universe” - so the question is: What type of king is he? Before we even get there, we have to wonder why God portrays Godself in Jesus Christ as a King anyway? We believe ourselves to be more enlightened than people of ancient times, and we can see rule by a king who is an absolute monarch as a thing of the past. But we have to see what message is God trying to communicate by using this kingly imagery.

First, the people who were around at the time the scriptures were composed had a different idea of kingship than we do now. They saw the King as specifically chosen by God, as having a power which cannot be simply taken away unless the king gives it up himself, or the king dies. Since Jesus does not surrender his power to anyone, and death does not work on him, nothing can end his reign - they would have seen this immediately. As we heard in the second reading: *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.* The reading goes on to say that *everything is subjected to him.* We hear that he has: *destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power.* He is the King above all earthy kings - no one rules over him. The king in ancient times was also the ultimate judge - the court of last appeal. So Jesus possess the power to judge - and there is no one who can override this decision - it is the judgement of God. There is no one more powerful, no one who makes laws that cancel his, no one who can judge above him. He is the ultimate authority.

Yet also, God is trying to communicate something to us in modern times by using royal imagery. We tend to see democracy as supreme form of government and social order. In a democracy, the power resides in the people who then delegate it to leaders. In a monarchy the power resides in the monarch who then delegates it to officers and officials. In a democracy the people also possess the ability to revoke the authority of the rulers and replace them. In a monarchy the ruler has to give away the power or pass it to another by death. In a democracy, laws may be changed if a majority of the people want them to. In a monarchy, the monarch

makes and changes the laws on their own authority. We can have this weird tendency - that ancient people did not - to apply the rules of democracy to our relationship with God, and forget who is the ultimate authority. We think that, by vote, we make all decisions on morality, life, and reality. The royal imagery in today's readings reminds us modern people who God is - and what our authority is in our relationship with God. God is not a president - God is a King.

So back to our earlier question: If Jesus is a King, then what type of King is he? The Gospel reading portrays him in his power with all the nations of the world assembled before him for judgement. Jesus' judgement is centered on how well those being judged have shown Jesus the King the respect he is due through their obeying him by caring of others. Not all obey the wishes of the King nor did they in past times. In our first reading, God is angry over the poor job that the earthly kings and rulers are doing for the people he loves - he decides he will do the job himself: *Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will look after and tend my sheep ... I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark. I myself will [feed] my sheep; I myself will give them rest, says the Lord GOD. ... the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal.* This is a king of all power who does not want to use his power to dominate and control what belongs to him, but would rather care for his subjects by coming among us as Jesus Christ to guide, shepherd, and care for us.

Jesus calls all those who are members of his Body to share in the role of the loving and shepherding king. Our faith in Jesus Christ tells us that through Baptism we are united to the Body of Christ - and enter eternal life as members of that body. We cannot act against the will of that King and remain inside the Body of the King. If we disobey and choose to remain outside of the Body we cannot enter into the realm where God is *all in all*. We don't enter eternal life because we decide that we or anyone else has been good enough - Jesus will judge. The Church, through the Holy Spirit, helps us to understand the laws our God and King has set before us - laws that God has every right to make. God sets these before us not to make Godself richer, or to be a tyrant ruler, they are there to shepherd us all to that eternal life. It is up to us to follow these in faith, with the strength given by the Body and Blood that he shares with us today. Remember, the real thing that brought judgement leading to eternal punishment to those in the Gospel was their lack of action - it wasn't that they did many wrong things, but that they failed to do what the king wanted them to do for others. Jesus calls us to obey him in faith and so stay united with him in his body, caring for his sheep. When we care for those sheep we please the king, and we remain united to his body. The very act of caring increases our love and faith, and helps the Lord to shepherd us also to eternal life.