

The Solemnity of Christ the King

“The myth of self-sufficiency”

Fr. Frank Schuster

I find it ironic that the Church’s celebration of Christ the King typically happens the same week of Thanksgiving. The reason for why I feel this way, historically speaking, many of our founding fathers and mothers of our country left the Old World for the New World to get away from kings, queens, lords, hierarchies, etc. At the heart of being American is a deep distrust of “King” or “Lord” language. From the very foundation of our country with the American Revolution, we are a people that like to elect our leaders and to fire our leaders when they don’t live up to our expectations. You cannot elect a King. You cannot elect a Lord. You are under their rule whether you like it or not. Americans distrust that kind of language and prefer language that points to American self-sufficiency.

When we celebrate Christ the King, however, we are called to recognize immediately that we are not self-sufficient. We see this in the Gospel reading. At the end of time, there will be a judgment whether we like it or not, and those who pay attention to Christ the King present in the people around us, especially the most vulnerable, will be recognized by God at the end of time. Those who ignore Christ the King present in the people around us, especially the most vulnerable, will not be recognized. We are reminded today to be more charitable of those among us who are not self-sufficient because when it comes to our salvation, no one is. No one is self-sufficient. We all need Jesus.

There is another element of the celebration of Christ the King many of you know about. This weekend marks the end of the liturgical year. The liturgy in the Catholic Church for Sundays and Solemnities run on a three year cycle. Since the first Sunday of Advent last year, we have been in Year A which is the year of St. Matthew’s Gospel. I find it thought provoking that the Church would pick this Gospel reading as a way of summarizing and celebrating St. Matthew’s theology on this last Sunday of Cycle A. It may be worthwhile to sit down with chapter 25 of St. Matthew’s Gospel at some point during this week and to simply pray with it. Essentially what Matthew is telling us: simply declaring Jesus as our Lord and King is not enough. Tee-shirts and bumper stickers won’t do it. We have to back our words with our actions, with what we do. Disciples who feed the hungry, who give the thirsty something to drink, who welcome strangers, who clothe the naked, who care for those who are sick, who visit those who are imprisoned, disciples who do those things will be recognized by Christ the King at the end of time. Those who pay lip service to Jesus but do not demonstrate love of neighbor will not be recognized. Jesus is telling us this because he sincerely wants to save us at the end of time and is showing us the way. As Lord and King, Jesus will provide us all the grace we need to persevere. And we need this grace, my friends, we need it. When it comes to our salvation, we are not self-sufficient.

Our Patroness, Mother Teresa, had a special devotion to this Gospel reading. When Jesus says, “I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,” Mother Teresa took this personally and invited everyone to see the face of Jesus in the poorest of the poor. Towards the end of her life, she wrote something profound that serves as an appropriate conclusion to the year of St.

Matthew and how to deepen our relationship to Christ the King. On March 25th, 1993, she told her community,

“Until you can hear Jesus in the silence of your own heart, you will not be able to hear Him saying “I thirst” in the hearts of the poor. Never give up this daily intimate contact with Jesus as the real living person—not just the idea. How can we last even one day without hearing Jesus say ‘I love you’—impossible.

“Our soul needs that as much as the body needs to breathe the air. If not, prayer is dead—meditation-only thinking. Jesus wants you each to hear Him—speaking in the silence of your heart. Be careful of all that can block that personal contact with the living Jesus. The devil may try to use the hurts of life, and sometimes our own mistakes—to make you feel it is impossible that Jesus really loves you, is really cleaving to you. This is a danger for all of us. And so sad, because it is completely opposite of what Jesus is really wanting, waiting to tell you. Not only that He loves you, but even more—He longs for you. He misses you when you don’t come close.

“He thirsts for you. He loves you always, even when you don’t feel worthy. When not accepted by others, even by yourself sometimes—He is the one who always accepts you. My children, you don’t have to be different for Jesus to love you.

“Only believe—You are precious to Him. Bring all you are suffering to His feet—only open your heart to be loved by Him as you are. He will do the rest.”

Profound wisdom! My friends, this weekend we celebrate the solemnity of Christ the King. When it comes to our salvation, we recognize we are not self-sufficient. We are called to kneel before Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life.