

The Solemnity of Christ the King (With Confirmation)

Bishop Frank Schuster

It is such a joy to be here with you to celebrate the sacrament of confirmation. God has brought you to this day. Believe it. I hope that my words will only reinforce what has already been shared with you this year.

Here at the end of every liturgical year, we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King. What is this feast day saying? It says that every liturgical celebration we had from last Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, all the Sundays of Ordinary Time, and all the special feast days and memorials along the way point to one truth: Jesus Christ is our Lord, he is our God, and he is King of the Universe. He is everything Saint Paul is writing about in our second reading. “[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him.”

What does this objectively mean? It means: if we think Jesus was just one great person among many, we would be wrong. If we think Jesus was a great philosopher among many, we would be wrong. If we think Christianity is just one nice belief among many, St. Paul says we would be wrong. Jesus is the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega and every letter in between. Jesus is God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through him all things were made. All fullness resides in Christ. Christ is the King of Kings.

And so, what does this king look like you might ask? Riffing a little from Bishop Robert Barron for a moment, our Gospel says this king looks like a man around thirty, bloodied and abused, dying a humiliating death on an instrument of torture. That is your king. That is your God. The juxtaposition of our second reading from St. Paul and the Gospel reading from St. Luke is quite jarring, to say the least. The word ironic doesn’t begin to describe it. What are we to make of it?

My friends, this solemnity is challenging us to understand kingship in a radically different way than what our culture would have us think. I mean, what do we think of when we use the word king? We think of a king as having worldly power, right? This is certainly the definition that the soldiers were using when they said with much sarcasm, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” What they are saying is, if you are a king, you should be able to save yourself better than anyone. Even one of the criminals there reviled Jesus saying, “Are you not the Christ, save yourself”. They were all working from the same definition of king that we might use in our culture today. If I have all the power or money in the world, I should be able to save myself better than anyone right?

The irony is: the true king revealed to us by God through Sacred Scripture is not the one who saves himself, but rather the one who forgets himself in love for others. The true king is not the one who inflates his ego, but rather considers other peoples’ lives as more important than his

own. The true king is not the one who fills himself up with the praises of others but rather empties himself out in altruistic love of the world, making peace by the blood of his cross. That is our king.

To underscore all of this, one of the most powerful moments in the entire bible is in today's Gospel reading. The good thief next to Jesus didn't get a lot of things right during his lifetime, and he knew that. He said he deserved to be punished like he was. He admitted this. How often do we feel that way? How often do we feel like we deserve to be punished for our sins? The good thief doesn't even feel worthy enough to ask for forgiveness. I find that piece of this Gospel the most interesting piece of all. He doesn't even feel worthy to ask for forgiveness. All he asks of Jesus is to be simply remembered when Jesus enters his Kingdom. He gets more than he bargained for, doesn't he? Jesus looks at him, sees his heart, and says, "Amen I say to you, this day you will be with me in paradise." That is how Jesus celebrates his kingship, not by saving himself, but rather by saving another.

What does this mean for us today? When it comes to having power or prestige, I think the Gospel says something radically different than what we have been fed over and over in our culture. Having power in our culture is usually about how much money we make, how much influence we have, and how well we can serve ourselves. The Gospel says something radically different. The Gospel says, if you want to have true power in your life, start caring for others more than yourself.

My friends, today you will receive from the Church the sacrament of confirmation. The word "confirmation" comes from the Latin word "to strengthen". Consider the words you will hear from me as you are anointed with Holy Chrism, "be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." A "gift" is unconditional, it doesn't have strings attached. Christ the King is giving you this gift because he loves you and believes in you, just like everyone in this church today. Let's move to the word "seal". A seal is essentially a signature, like a seal of an envelope. It is as if God created you so that your life can be his message to the rest of the world. Christ the King wants to put his signature to it for all to see in permanent ink. You can't rub it off. That is how much he loves you. Believe it.

Yes, my friends, when we receive the gift of God's love into our hearts, and let it in, we can't sit still anymore. Like the apostles, we become sent as ambassadors of Christ the King in our love and service of others, especially the poor and vulnerable. That is how Jesus celebrated his kingship. We are called to do the same.

If this solemnity says anything, it says this. Jesus is not just one great historical figure among others. Jesus isn't just one great philosopher among many. Jesus is God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father. What this means is, when we live our lives with integrity in light of the Gospel, when we reach out in love and service to another, and celebrate the gift of Confirmation by treating others as more important than ourselves, we participate in the power that created the universe as baptized followers of Christ the King.