

Christ the King (2016)

(2 Sam 5:1-3; Col 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43)

So often we think of today's great solemnity, Christ the Universal King, as an end--the end of the liturgical year, and as the culmination of all that has come before, starting with Advent and Christmas, when Jesus first appeared in the world. We think of His public ministry in which He laid the foundation for the coming Kingdom of God, and so forth. And that is where we are now--the culmination of all that has gone before, singing, "Crown Him with Many Crowns."

But rather than that being a conclusion to what had gone before, we should think of it, rather, as a beginning, a beginning of where Jesus goes from here. Jesus did not come simply to be crowned king of the universe; He came to establish the kingdom of God. Next Sunday, we know, will be the beginning of Advent, the start of a new liturgical year. So the liturgical year is cyclical, beginning ever anew. But history, reality, is not cyclical. It progresses, and it will come to a consummation, a climax.

God has a plan, and the Bible speaks much of it; most often it is opposed to human plans. Psalm 33 says:

The Lord foils the plan of nations, / frustrates the designs of peoples.

But the plan of the Lord stands forever, /wise designs through all generations (v 10-11).

At the beginning of a kingly reign, there needs to be a plan, a policy. To continue this homily, I needed to know what Jesus' plan would be. Frequently, as many of you know, St. Joseph has given me help for homilies, but always for things past. But to speak of the future, I needed the author of the Book of Revelation, so I called on St. John. St. John did come to help, but he said, "In spite of the wide-spread opinion, I did not write the Book of Revelation. However, I can give you a little peek into the drama pictured there." So he opened a little door in the sky and I saw there the heavenly court, all creatures were prostrate before the Throne, all casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea, and they worshiped the Lamb, crying out:

"Worthy are you to receive the scroll and to break open its seals, for you were slain and with your blood you purchased for God those from every tribe and tongue, people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign on earth" (Rev 5:9-10).

So I learned that this is the goal intended by Our King. If we look at our world, we know this is not where we are now. Are we better off than when we started out? Where did we start out? If we look back to Genesis we see the point at which mankind was scattered. It was through hubris, pride, humankind wanting to make a name for itself, saying, "Come, let us build a tower with its top in the sky." And for their pride they were scattered. We have here not a

simple confusion of languages: it means rather division and separation at every level of existence—brother from brother, nation from nation—so that strife and war was possible and actual; mankind was scattered.

Some remedy for this was begun at the first Pentecost, when peoples from all nations—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Rome, Cretans and Arabs, all heard the apostles speaking so that all could be understood. More than that, with the establishment of the Church, a new unity was given. These people now had one faith to unite them; more importantly, the force that bound them together was love, a force that should have banished all enmity, hostility, rivalry. Jesus was most insistent: “love one another, as I have loved you.” Moreover, their leading teacher, St. Paul, had insisted on equality of all: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 4:28). When the Apostles converted much of the then known world, it was by preaching the gospel and their Master’s message of love, the most powerful force in creation.

So all this brought the world together, yes? NO! Wonderful principles, but not lived up to. Jesus was poor and loved the poor, but many Christians loved wealth better, and so there was inequality. Once Christians had become the prominent group, they forgot their Jewish roots, that Jesus, Mary, the apostles were Jewish, and in some

places and times became violently anti-Semitic, guilty of oppression, even pogroms. Then the violence, destruction in Muslim lands that accompanied the Crusades generated hatred for Christians in Moslem countries that has never been effaced. Once the Reformation emerged, Catholics in some places attempted to suppress it with shameful inquisitions, torture, and death. They had forgotten the message of love. So also, when the Islamic wave engulfed a large part of the world, it was not spread by love but by the scimitar and forced conversions.

And so we look at the world as it is now—ISIS, Syria, aggressive behavior in North Korea, China, and Russia. But God is very patient: think how long it took the universe to evolve, billions of years. And that involved many false starts and new beginnings. In some ways we have learned. The ecumenical movement tries to bring Christian denominations together. The United Nations tries to bring countries together. And we must remember the parable of the leaven, the relentless force that slowly permeates, which is the force of love, if we will believe in it.

The battle with ISIS is ideological and will not be won with bombs and bullets; hatred attracts and will continue to attract volunteers from Arab countries as well as from Europe and America. But there are 3.3 million Muslims in the USA, only a tiny percentage of which is radicalized. If we accept them as brothers and sisters, as they truly are, that will deliver an important message to

ISIS, quite a different one than if we were to demonize them. That is the way of love. It's not the prevailing wisdom, but the prevailing wisdom has not worked very well. The same can be said of many other issues that face us. The recent elections at the USCCB, at which the Catholic bishops chose Cardinal Daniel DiNardo as President and Mexican born Jose Gomez as Vice President, were said to be a "shot across the bows" of prevailing views, so perhaps we are headed in the right direction.

History, I said earlier, comes to a consummation. It will not be the fiery Armageddon so desired by fundamentalists. Our earlier look into heaven told us that the Lamb had with His blood "purchased for God those from every tribe and every tongue, from every people and every nation. You made them a kingdom . . . and they will reign on earth." Isaiah tells us that "in the last days all nations will flow to Mount Zion, will receive God's instructions, will beat their swords into plowshares, nor shall they train for war again" (Isa 2:2-4).

Impossible, you say? Remember who is the King who leads us. God, Our Father, does not forget the blood Jesus shed to bring this about. We must not forget that love is the most powerful force in the universe. St. Paul promises us, "Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ" (2 Cor 2:14).