

CHRIST THE KING
Rev. Gary Magarrell November 22, 2009

Today we celebrate Christ the King Sunday along with our brothers and sisters around the world. This Sunday ends our liturgical church year. Now we will prepare to be led into the new Church year with the anticipation of Advent and the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ.

Christ the King is one of the titles of Jesus used by all Christians based on several passages of Scripture. Many denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church and the mainline Protestant churches such as our own United Church, celebrate in honour of Christ, the Feast of Christ the King on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, before a new year begins with the First Sunday of Advent. The Feast of Christ the King is thus celebrated each year on the Sunday which falls between the 20th and the 26th of November.

When we use the name Christ the King, we know this derives from various forms in scripture. Following are some of the title usages in scripture:

- In 1st Timothy 1:17, we have Timothy refer to Christ as King Eternal
- In John 1:49, Christ is referred to as King of Israel
- In Matthew 27:11, Christ is referred to as King of the Jews, the sign placed over the cross
- In 1st Timothy 6:15 and again in Revelations 19:16, Christ is referred to as King of kings
- In Revelations 15:3, Christ is referred as King of the Ages
- Again in Revelations 1: 5, Christ is called the Ruler of the Earth

Thus we can ascertain that the concept of Christ as King is very old and dates from the earliest days of the Christian experience.

The marking of this particular Sunday as Christ the King Sunday or Reign of Christ Sunday is a 19th Century Feast declared first by Pope Pius XI and quickly adopted by many Protestant churches to recognize this true description of Christ, his mission and his ministry to all men and women. It also appeared to be a natural conclusion of the church liturgical year before we move on to a new cycle of worship.

The use of the word King with Christ really disturbs some people who find any definition of king as unacceptable. They tend to think of kings as tyrants whose rule over many is more often unjust than just in their opinion. A friend was telling me that his minister had spoken against this use of the word king simply because it had so many negative connotations. Maybe better the term was forgotten and left in the dustbin of history.

However, before we throw out the word King in the title Christ the King, we need to review how Jesus acted as the King he said he was. Clearly, Jesus' life was not that of one of military might or oppressiveness.

If we look at Jesus, his life and his daily way was one of peace, liberation and service to all. Jesus, in this term Christ the King, turns the whole concept of lordship and primacy on its head.

In Mark 10:42-45 we read as follows: “You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to become great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of man is not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus was well aware of the definitions of his day as it related to kings, emperors and those in authority. Jesus redefined these images but did not totally reject them. In the new age according to Jesus, in order to be a ruler of all, a person had to be a servant of all. Jesus exhibited this in all aspects of his life and in his miracles. Perhaps the greatest example of this is the Incarnation: God the Son, King of all creation, humbled himself to become human, even sharing the ultimate fate of his captive subjects: death itself.

Jesus’ role of King is closely tied as well to his role as Judge. We repeat in our Apostles’ Creed “that Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will know no end.” Jesus is no ordinary judge for he looks at the heart and does not judge by our human standards. While human systems of justice may be primarily retributive exacting punishment for crimes or serious mistakes, Jesus’ justice is restorative, designed to lead one to repentance and salvation. Christ always looks to redeem rather than to punish.

So, while in our day people believe everything should be democratic, the image of God as an all powerful king bothers many of this generation. But we know that God is a different kind of king indeed: all powerful, but also all-loving, all-merciful and in a loving relationship with his creatures who he had created. In our submission to God and to Jesus as Lord and King, the strange thing is that this very submission brings with it our liberation, our freedom from our sins.

Finally, we note that most of the references to Jesus as king occur during the Passion narratives in the Gospels. The kingship of Jesus is most proclaimed often when he is on the cross. The brutal suffering and death illustrates the kind of king he was – one willing to give his life for the freedom of his people.

The insignia of Christ the King shows Jesus, his back against the cross, wearing a crown, arms wide open with nail prints in his hands. It is a welcoming King, a living and vivacious King, a King who has conquered death and lives again.

It is in the light of this certainty of the Lordship of Christ that we read in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Paul is clearly pleased with the way the Church in Ephesus is progressing. He comments on the love they freely show towards one another and the wisdom they exhibit in making the life of the congregation both happy and responsible. He is pleased

he says that they have been given the wisdom to know the hope in the life to which they have been called by God. He speaks of the immeasurable greatness of God's power in those who believe in him, that same power that not only transforms life but enriches and sustains it.

Paul reminds them of how God not only sent Jesus into the world to be a sacrifice for all people, but this same God resurrected him. Jesus now sits above all men at the right hand of God, far above any rulers of the earth, either in the ages before or the ages after the time of Christ on earth.

Paul is trying very hard to speak to people of his time who have difficulty understanding the key role Jesus played in God's plan for all men and women. Most people are not theologians and even theologians do not always agree with one another.

Paul wants the people in Ephesus to worry not about understanding all the theological implications of everything. However, do acknowledge what you feel when you experience Jesus the Christ for yourself. Acknowledge your joy and the hope that springs into one's life when you meet Jesus. Experience the freedom that comes from giving your life and heart to him. Know that the God you worship is the all powerful God, the one who sent his own son to die for you and for your salvation.

The Matthew reading today follows the readings of the Parable of the Wise and Foolish maidens and the Parable of the Talents. This reading speaks of God's standard of judgment.

What does God expect of those of us who have given ourselves over to him in joy and love? These passages show that we must be conscious of helping in the simplest of things. This passage makes clear that we will be judged in accordance with our reaction to human need. It is not how much fame, fortune and good things we have acquired, but what have we done with that which we were given.

Jesus speaks of the simple things that count: have we fed the hungry, have we given the thirsty something to drink, have we welcomed the stranger into our home, have we felt the pain of the homeless and oppressed? These things are not beyond our ability or capacity to do. But have we done so in grateful response to what we see and know?

Jesus clearly is also speaking of help to others that is not done calculating what we can achieve from this act. We should help others simply because we can not help but do so, not to impress God, but because we feel the pain of others and we want to respond. The heart of a follower of Jesus must expand to encompass the needs of the world.

We all know that if Jesus were here, we would gladly help him. If we had only known Jesus was in that person in need, naturally we would have assisted more. No, no Jesus said, you should know that I am present in all who ask for help and therefore you do minister to him just as he ministers to you.

There is an old story often told through the ages in the church. There was a man known as Martin of Tours. He was a Roman soldier and a Christian. One cold winter day, as he was entering a city, a beggar stopped him and asked him for alms. Martin had no money; but the beggar was blue and shivering with cold and Martin gave what he had. He took off his soldier's coat, worn and frayed as it was; he cut it in two and gave half to the beggar man. That night Martin had a dream. In it he saw the heavenly places with all the angels and Jesus in the midst of them; Jesus was wearing half of a Roman soldier's cloak. One of the angels said to him, "Master, why are you wearing that battered old cloak? Who gave it to you?" And Jesus answered softly, "My servant Martin gave it to me."

When we learn the generosity which without calculation helps men and women in the simplest things, then we too will know the joy of helping Jesus Christ Himself.

That story we can hear and we can easily nod with approval as we hear it. We can visualize ourselves in that story – the problem is that we forget and get caught up in our busyness and our judgments of others and we miss the opportunity to simply serve Christ by our service to others.

Christ the King – the image of the all powerful Christ who had conquered death and rose again to lead all God's creation to eternal life. The crux of this story is the image of the all powerful who humbled himself to be born into the world as a child, to live among us and for our sake face pain and death. His resurrection back to life is the validation we need in knowing that Christ is a worthy Lord, a Lord whose praise we can sing forever.

And thus ends another year when we followed Jesus through the scriptures, as we walked with him in his ministry, as we sat among the crowds and listened to his words, as we came into Jerusalem with Palm branches welcoming him as a king and then a few days later, following the crowds to Golgotha, the Place of the Skulls watching Jesus give up his life and die.

Out of the despair and the need to see Christ, we went to his tomb and found he was no longer there. In the garden we thought he was the gardener until he spoke our name and we knew absolutely that Jesus was alive and was indeed the Son of God.

So here we are, we look back and are grateful for our journey together as a people of faith, with all our shortcomings as well as our strengths. We are content and with ease we call Jesus – Christ the King!

Thanks be to God!