

Last Sunday of the Church Year 11/21/21
John 18:33-37

“MY KINGDOM IS NOT FROM THE WORLD”

On this Christ the King Sunday, we hear Pilate ask Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews” (v. 33)? As you ponder that question, think about this for a minute.

Kings are born and kings live in palaces. Jesus was born in a stable. At one point, He said, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Mt 8:20). When kings are born, they are attended to by princes and royal officials, but when Jesus was born, He was attended to by sheep, and oxen, and shepherds. Kings assemble armies with mighty men. Jesus assembled a dozen guys, some who were fishermen, and one even a tax collector. Kings have great and important dealings with other governments. Jesus’ only dealing with government amounted to Pilate asking Him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

Even before Pilate, Jesus doesn’t look like a king. Kings are adorned in robes of splendor; garments of the finest and most expensive fabric and they wear crowns of gold and precious stones. Jesus is beaten, bruised, bleeding, and crowned with ... thorns.

Pilate wants to know if Jesus is a king and that’s a good question to ask because there is not a lot of evidence to support the fact that Jesus is a king. He doesn’t act like a king; He doesn’t even look like a king.

You know who else would like to know if Jesus is a King? You, you do, Dear Child of God. Jesus didn’t look like a king standing there before Pilate. And honestly, as we walk by faith, to our eyes, eyes that sometimes

fill with tears, He doesn't always look like a king who rules over all, and governs His church for our good.

That is because we see a contradiction between suffering and Christ's rule. It is easy to believe that God is in charge of things when all is going well. But, it is not easy to understand how Christ is our King who rules over all the world when evil is so rampant and prevalent in the world and in our lives. If Christ is our king, why are there wars and famines and diseases, heartache and sorrow? Why do I have so many aches and pains in my body? Why is my bank account empty? If Christ is my king, why does my spouse who once spoke those words, "I do," now doesn't? If Christ rules all things for my good, why does my child now say the words, "I hate you"?

I remember well a story one of my beloved Seminary professors would tell. He was a pastor in his first parish, fresh out of the Seminary himself. A young family had two little boys that were full of energy. On Sundays, the boys would enter church and he would hold out his arm and the boys would swing from it. His first Easter Sunday came and He proclaimed the empty tomb of Easter morning in worship. That very afternoon, he received a phone call telling him that there had been an accident at that young family's house. The boys were playing on their bunk beds, when one fell and broke his neck. As the pastor was walking up to the house, he was met by the father walking out of the house carrying the body of his dead son. He stopped and looked the pastor in his eyes, and said, "Where's the resurrection now, Pastor?"

To our human reason and to what we see with our human eyes this day, it seems the crosses we bear are evidence that Christ is not ruling and reigning this world as our King.

“In the world you will have tribulation,” Jesus promised us (Jn 16:33). And, we don’t want it! The crosses that we bear are reminders to us that this creation and our lives are cursed by sin. And, we don’t like it one bit.

Ever since the fall into sin, we have been held hostage by sin, death, and the devil. That is why we have tribulation, trouble, tears -- today. But we have hope and comfort and joy because of the words our King Jesus speaks, “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

II. The Apostle St. John proclaims that sweet comfort to us this Sunday with his words in our Epistle reading, “To Him who loves us – that is, Jesus – and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” (Re 1:5-6). The GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that Jesus came to free you from your sin and all its wages of death and transfer you to His Kingdom of Grace. And He did it by being born of a Virgin to be human just like you. And He took upon His human frame all the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death -- every illness and tragedy, every sorrow and heartache, every remorse and regret, every word of deceit and anger, every act of malice and evil – and He carried it to the cross to die a violent and bloody death. By His death, He triumphed over sin and all the curse of sin.

Jesus’ lifeless body was taken from the cross and laid to rest in the tomb. Three days later, God raised His Son to life again to give you freedom from your sin and to bring you into His Kingdom of Grace.

That’s what Jesus did in the new birth of Water and the Word of your Baptism. He forgave you all of your sin and brought you into His kingdom, where He reigns over you with the forgiveness of sins and His grace. Here, in His kingdom, He reigns over you as your king.

III. In these last Sundays of the church year, as we focus on the second and final coming of Christ, we are to be watchful and faithful, eagerly awaiting our Lord's return, praying as always, "Thy Kingdom Come." This Last Sunday comforts us, that as we wait, Christ is our King who has triumphed over sin, death, and the devil.

Our Old Testament lesson is Daniel's prophecy of the Ascension of Jesus,

"and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and He came to the Ancient of Days – that is, God the Father Himself – and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Da 7:13-14).

This is the same thing Jesus Himself taught us at His ascension, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me (Mt 28:18)." He now rules with His almighty power over "all peoples, nations, and languages," especially governing and protecting His Church. And, He will lead His church to the glory of heaven.

But, as we wait, eagerly but patiently, for our Lord to come again and rescue us from every evil and lead us to heaven, we remember His words, "My kingdom is not of this world" (v. 36). This earth was not Jesus' home; and it is not our home, either. We are strangers here. As Jesus carried the cross during His earthly sojourn, we can expect no less.

And under the cross, Dear Friends in Christ, we must ever remember that we do not walk by sight, but by faith. Through the hearing and learning of His Word and the eating and drinking of His Son's body and blood, God gives us grace and strengthens the faith He gave us in our baptism so that we may in faith see that Jesus is our King who rules and rules over all

things. Our faith sees that He is ever with us, to sympathize with us in our weaknesses. His rod and His staff do comfort and cheer us. He prays and pleads for us before the throne of God in heaven. And He uses His almighty power to work good in all things us.

And we take heart and are brave when the fight is long, "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (He 4:8). Today, we bear the cross. But, the day of our deliverance is coming, when God will wipe all the tears from our eyes and we will rest from our struggles because Jesus is our King.