

Year C, November 24, 2019  
Last Pentecost – Christ the King  
Christ Church, Mexia

We know from our study of history that kings have played a major part in the history of mankind. Even the Israelites, who initially had no king but rather relied on Yahweh, their God, as their leader, eventually wanted to be like their neighbors and asked God for a king, and God reluctantly obliged. Kings were powerful people, none higher in a particular country or nation. They had great wealth and usually made no attempt to hide it. In fact, they most often went out of their way to display it - because wealth tended to be associated with power.

We've heard examples of good kings and bad kings – those who were admired and those who were opposed - at least secretly, if not openly. But essentially, kings stood at the top of the human pyramid. We had no paradigm with which to elevate someone, a human being, higher than king, at least during the first century. Thus, King became the term for the ultimate human leader in those early years.

But what picture do we see of Christ, our King, today in the scripture? A person hanging on a wooden cross between two common criminals with an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." The soldiers and the crowd are mocking him, except for one of the criminals, who defends him and declares the injustice of his punishment, and who asks to be remembered by him when Jesus comes into his kingdom. What does he know that the others don't? How does he know about Jesus' kingdom? I really have no idea; I have to assume intuition or knowledge from God.

However, I do know that this picture of a man being crucified on a cross is a far cry from what we think about when we think of kings, even today when most kings have only a ceremonial role in government rather than absolute power. They live better than Jesus lived in worldly terms, and they did better than this. They generally have wealth, which gives them power. But what is the power of the cross? How can we declare Jesus to be King of Kings, Lord of Lords?

Before continuing, I am reminded of a story: "A first-grade boy was told by his mother to return home directly after school was dismissed, but he arrived home from school late almost every day. He was sometimes as much as twenty

minutes late. His mother asked him, 'You get out of school the same time every day. Why can't you be home at the same time?' He said, 'It depends on the cars.' 'What do cars have to do with it?' The youngster explained, 'The patrol boy who takes us across the street makes us wait until some cars are coming along so he can stop them.'" An example, of wanting to use or exercise power... And most of us like to exercise the power that we have.

The people witnessing the crucifixion and some of the soldiers exhort Jesus to save himself, to use his power – if he has it, because they don't necessarily believe that he does. This is much like the temptation that Jesus endured in the wilderness after his baptism. Satan knew that Jesus had the power to do the things he asked him to do, but Jesus didn't use his power then, and he didn't use it on the cross. Having power and not using it is something that is very difficult for us to imagine, especially if it is to help ourselves. That is not the model that we are used to seeing in this world, especially today when so much of what we do is centered on what is best for ourselves, and not necessarily others.

In contrast, the power of Jesus, however, was to be used to conquer death by rising again in three days and not only for him, but for the whole world – the whole world, and that insured the beginning of the kingdom of God on earth. His power was used for the common good, for others, not for himself. Yet 2,000 years later it appears that fewer and fewer understand, accept, and live in accordance with this concept.

C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*: "I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who is merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."

So, judge leaders by how they use their power. Is it used for themselves or other's interests? In Jeremiah's day, kings and other leaders were often referred to as shepherds and he says they scattered the flock rather than gathering it together. They, the kings and priests, were corrupt; they didn't care for Israel, but for themselves. That situation was responsible for the Babylonian exile.

By contrast, Elias Chacour, Archbishop of Galilee for the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, stands out as an authentic model of Christ's leadership. While preaching at the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 2008, he said that he didn't want the help of that body if they were going to take sides, one or the other. Rather he encouraged them to come to visit where Christ was resurrected and to work for true peace for all parties. He is an example of the leadership of Christ, for it is not by force but by love and caring for the oppressed, being totally inclusive, that God's love is made manifest in the world.

King of Kings, Lord of Lords, he will reign forever and ever... Can we see and accept this – and be with him in Paradise one day?

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

*Amen*