

SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE KING NOVEMBER 25, 2018

Let me put my cards on the table right away. Let me tell you what I really think. I do not like this feast of Christ the King. I don't like it because it too easily lends itself to a triumphalistic image of the church with triple tiaras, princes of the church, ermine capes, red silk trains, lots of jewelry, hierarchical and imperialistic power. Some of the music is bombastic. It seems to me that we need a much humbler church today with leaders as servants. And I believe that image of Christ is the true one. Jesus acted as a prophet, not a king.

He called himself the Son of Man which simply means a human being.

Not many of you probably remember Clarence Jordan who died in 1969. He had a doctorate in New Testament Studies from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. In 1942, with his wife Florence and a couple of other families, he founded Koinonia, an experiment in Christian living in Georgia. He gave himself to the reconciliation of Blacks and Whites. Because of his interracial views, he was expelled from the local Baptist Church. Koinonia was subjected to a reign of terrorism. Jordan published his vernacular translation of the New Testament which he called his "Cotton Patch version." Setting the story of Jesus "along the dusty rows of cotton, corn and peanuts," in rural Georgia, he believed that the problem with Christianity stemmed from the fact that most Christians pictured Jesus enthroned in heaven or safely confined to "Bible times," thus missing the challenge of the Incarnation. By glorifying Christ, he wrote, "we more effectively rid ourselves of him than those who crucified him." Glorifying Jesus as God and not paying attention to his message continues by Christians in our day.

Now that I have made my disclaimers to the kingship of Jesus, let me turn to today's gospel where Jesus admits that he is a King. But then he adds that his kingdom is not from this world. This is the proper translation of Jesus' words, not "my kingdom does not belong to this world" but "my kingdom is not from this world." We have too often understood Jesus saying his kingdom is in the next life, not here. But that is incorrect. His kingdom was definitely to be for this world, his vision is for all of us in the present. But the image of kingdom is not from this world. He will demonstrate his kingship when he is crucified on the cross and wears a crown of thorns. Ironically, Pilate, the next day after this gospel, will testify to this as well when he has a sign put on the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews."

When the church is criticized for holding up public values, the common good, the dignity of all human beings, the church is preaching the kingdom of God. Contrary to some accusations, Jesus' kingdom has much to say to the public weal, to politics and public morality. It is, indeed, especially with policies that affect the poor, the homeless, those without health care, immigrants, children, minority peoples that followers of Jesus must be concerned.

The gospel tells us that Jesus, in claiming his place as King, goes on to say that he came into the world to testify to the truth.

“Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” We are God’s people when we adhere to the truth, preach the truth, acknowledge the truth even when it is embarrassing or painful to do so. It is fundamental. Ultimately Jesus is himself the truth as he proclaimed, “I am the way, the truth, the life.” Jesus’ teaching revolved around the reign or kingdom of God. Do our choices in life revolve around that vision? As king, Jesus defined his realm where the strongest serve the rest, where love and compassion for all, even the least of the people of the earth, is our lifestyle.

Honoring Christ as our King today, therefore, means honoring the truth and following it. The kingdom of God takes form in a home where parents and children love one another, in every region and country that cares for its weak and vulnerable, where every community reaches out to the needy. The kingdom of God happens when someone feeds a hungry person, shelters a homeless person, shows care to a neglected person. It happens whenever people join to overcome poverty, erase ignorance, pass on the faith.

The kingdom of God is in the past in the life and work of Jesus. It is in the present in the work of the church and the efforts of many to create a world of goodness and justice. It is in the future reaching its completion in the world to come. The kingdom of God is a condition. Its symptoms are love, justice and peace.

Viva Cristo Re - Jesus Christ is King! We pray today that God may free all the world to rejoice in his peace, to glory in his justice, to live in his love.

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