

Feast of Christ the King  
November 22, 2009

### Introduction

It seems important to clear away some "debris" before we reflect on the meaning of this Feast Day. The title "Christ the King" can be offputting to many in our American culture. It does smack of royalty, power, triumphalism - as quite frankly do the Scripture readings for this day. I believe, however, that the Gospel gives us a way through this bramble. Jesus is before Pontius Pilate on trial for his life. Now Pilate was governor of Judea, the representative of Imperial Rome in one its far-flung provinces, pretty much removed from the center of the Empire. My guess is that Pilate was not the brightest light in Rome's diplomatic corps.

Yet here Jesus is being judged by this little functionary. If this is Jesus' kingship, it's very, very different from what anyone then or now would expect. This, then is what might be called the "anti-kingship" of Jesus and what we celebrate today.

### I

In addition, the Feast is all about Jesus' Reign. He responds to Pilate's question about his kingship by talking about his reign not being of this world.

We know that the Reign of God was the principal theme of Jesus' preaching:

"the Reign of God is at hand"

"you are not far from the Reign of God"

"the Reign of God is within you"

"the Reign of God is like unto - a mustard seed, a woman who loses a small coin, a treasure buried in a field, a person who gives a great banquet" - and on and on.

### II

We deduce from Jesus' emphasis on the Reign of God that it is the overarching goal - purpose of human history.

It is also the chief task of the Church. In the Second Vatican Council document entitled "The Church in the Modern World" one line jumps off the page in this regard: "The Church has a SINGLE INTENTION, that the Reign of God may come [emphasis mine]". (Gaudium et Spes #45).

### III

We can also deduce from Jesus' life and teachings something of what God's Reign looks like, how we can perceive it, what are its hallmarks.

Freedom - Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for humans not humans for the Sabbath.

Dignity - Jesus treated everyone with the dignity due God's daughters and sons

Inclusion - Jesus ate and drank with prostitutes, tax collectors and other unsavory characters.

Unity - He prayed on the night before he died "that all might be one".

Justice - "Seek first the Kingdom of God and God's justice..."

Peace - He was called the Prince of Peace

Love - His one final commandment was "love one another".

These are Kingdom of God values. We recognize the Reign of God when we see these values operating in human life.

Today's prayer as we begin the Eucharist also highlights these notes of God's Reign. In part it says: "...he claims dominion over all creation, that he may present to you, his almighty Father, an eternal and universal kingdom: a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace..."

And in the Eucharistic Prayer we shall use today, we say these words: "He sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father, as his first gift to those who would be his followers, so that we might COMPLETE HIS WORK ON EARTH, [emphasis mine] and bring ourselves and all peoples the fullness of grace". This is truly a Reign of God prayer which sums up for me much of what life is all about.

### Conclusion

Let me say a final word about the Church. Many of us are quite critical of the Church and with good reason in so many cases. We chafe under what we consider non-essentials which the institution seems fixed upon. But that is not the whole story of our Church. This past summer, as you know, I had the opportunity to travel to the Church in Latin America, Asia and Africa. In each of those places I witnessed vibrant Catholic communities with wonderful and visionary ideals set out by the Episcopal leadership there. This gives me great hope, the hope once enkindled in me when, during my years working in South America, the Institutional Church called itself - bishops, priests, religious women and men, and laity to a preferential option for the poor.

Such Pentecost moments are always possible in our Church and it is at its best when it responds to such moments, thereby contributing to the construction of God's Reign in this world.