

***FIRST IMPRESSIONS* CHRIST THE KING (B)**

Daniel 7: 13-14 Psalm 93 Revelation 1: 5-8 John 18: 33b-37

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

Mere human rulers have actually claimed to be gods and expected worship – humans like Caesar and the emperors of pre-World War II Japan. There were also other rulers who held on to their thrones claiming, “divine right.” Supposedly they and their descendants were chosen by God to rule, for example, the monarchies of Europe. Right up to the present, oppressive regimes have suppressed their subjects as if they were better than their citizens and had a right to their power.

Today’s first two readings seem to claim similar prerogatives for Jesus’ rule. In the gospels the title “Son of Man” was Jesus’ self-description. While the title emphasized his humanity, in Daniel’s apocalyptic vision the “one like a “Son of Man” approaches the Ancient One’s throne and seems to share in God’s rule. The Book of Revelation reflects Christ’s glory and ruling power as well. He is described as “the ruler of the kingdoms of the earth.” There is no doubt that his is power, glory and dominion of the highest kind, and his return will reflect his rule, for he will come “amid the clouds.” At that time all will see him, “even those who pierced him.”

The first two readings establish Jesus as King, well above all pretenders who claim their authority to rule from God. We seem prepared, even urged, by these two readings to celebrate the kingship of Christ with appropriate pomp and circumstance. Bring on the best and biggest gold vessels, put on specially reserved vestments, double the size of the choir and make sure there are trumpets. I guess that would be one way to celebrate this feast of true royalty, Christ our King. So, we can stop here.

But our gospel reading throws a damper over any unbridled festivities today and gives us pause. The one we rightly believe to be our King is on trial for his life. He is about to be condemned by Pilate, the local representative of the “divine Caesar.” One God face to face with the cronies of another god and both powers couldn’t be further apart. Which raises questions for us: to whom do we give our loyalty? Before which throne do we bend the knee, bow and promise to be loyal until

death?

Unlike the Synoptics, in John's gospel Jesus does have royal demeanor and attributes. He speaks with a calm authority and there are memorable discourses throughout this gospel with: Nicodemus (3:1ff), the Samaritan woman (4:1ff), the healed paralytic (5:1ff; 6:1ff), etc. When he enters Jerusalem (12:12ff) the people proclaim, "Blessed is the King of Israel." No wonder Pilate asks him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Pilate wants to know if Jesus is claiming political power. Is Jesus a revolutionary who will gather the Jews in an attempt to overthrow Roman domination? Remember formerly, after the multiplication of the breads, Jesus withdrew from those who wanted to make him a messianic King. Pilate puts the question to Jesus and now, at his trial, Jesus seems to accept the title of king. But he makes it quite clear that he is not the kind of king Pilate or Jesus' excited followers have in mind. He says to Pilate, "My kingdom does not belong to this world." It sounds as if Jesus has a throne in a far off castle on another planet, or in another galaxy far from the planet Earth. It also sounds as if Jesus is claiming his kingdom is something immaterial, unearthly or "spiritual." But it isn't. Because Jesus is referring to this world into which he was born, "to testify to the truth" (18:37).

Jesus separated himself and his rule from Pilate's world; the world of power, subjugation, political alliances, militarism and all the ways the Roman world and ours identify rule. Jesus' kingdom is an alternate world, nevertheless, it is present here and now. But it is not "of the world" that neglects human dignity and rights, nor is it the world of cruelty and oppression Pilate was so entwined in. So, Jesus was responding to Pilate's question, "Are you the King of the Jews?" by saying, in effect, "I am the king Pilate, but not in the world in which you have power and exert control." If Jesus' kingdom is not on the other side of the cosmos, where is it and what does it look like? And are we part of it here and now?

Jesus' kingdom, his world, is with us now. We have, through our baptism and the gift of the Spirit, been given the vision to see the presence of the kingdom and its life-giving possibilities. It is a world of community, equality, respect and dialogue. In this kingdom, under Jesus' rule, each person's gifts are recognized. The poor and neglected are empowered and no one is left out. Justice is given to each, regardless of their political influence, race, gender or economic status.

Jesus' kingdom is not our own little private possession, nor is our relationship with the King our own special domain. We are not detached from one another. It's not,

“Jesus and me.” The First Letter of John reminds us believers of our ties with both God and neighbor. “No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us and God’s love is brought to perfection in us” (4:12). The kingdom over which Jesus reigns is not some ethereal, other world in a far-off place. God has taking flesh and we members of the kingdom are called here and now to recognize that our neighbor is the dwelling place of the divine.

One preacher suggested that we could substitute “system” for “world” in John. We live in a conflicted and divided world, in a “system” of domination. (That coercion isn’t always blatant. It can be as subtle as a television commercial or an advertisement for the latest cell phone.) Whereas Jesus’ “system” or world, is one of self-giving love which he embodied throughout his life and death.

Ancient royals were anointed on their heads with oil to acknowledge their office and duties. Jesus’ kingly anointing was of a different kind. His feet were anointed by Mary of Bethany in preparation for his “royal” office and duties, his upcoming death (12:1-11). When we were baptized we were anointed with oil – chrism. We were united with Christ the King in dignity and a call to service. So, shall we continue to choose him throughout our lives? Each and every day? Life constantly presents options to us; asks us to choose sides. It’s not about rejecting this present life and waiting till the next when Christ will be our one-and-only King. It’s about making daily choices here and now for him and his reign.

Today we again renew our faith in Jesus and his kingdom. He will return in glory. But he also does that each day through our neighbor. We, his subjects, give him glory by our service to others in his name.

Here’s an example of the world’s “system.”

26 years ago, Dewey Bozella, a petty criminal, was convicted of brutally killing an elderly woman. In subsequent parole hearings, if he had confessed to the crimes, he would have gotten out of prison after about 15 years. But from the very beginning he claimed his innocence and said, “I would never admit to something I didn’t do.” So, he stayed in prison – for 26 years! The case against him was always slim. The chief witnesses were two men with criminal histories who repeatedly changed their stories and, for their testimony, got favorable treatment in their own cases. A fingerprint of another man, who was later convicted of a similar crime, was found at the scene of the woman’s murder. There was no physical evidence that linked Dewey Bozella with the crime. The “system” had Dewey in its grip.

Here’s how an alternate “system” works. The Innocence Project, a legal group that investigates wrongful convictions, took up the case. They did their own

investigation and got a big law firm to take on Dewey's case on a pro bono basis. And they proved his innocence! Dewey, after 26 years in New York's Sing Sing Prison, is now a free man. I don't know what, if any, religious affiliation the members of the Innocence Project have, but their "system" certainly shows signs of the kingdom that Christ our King proclaimed – where the innocent are protected and prisoners are set free.

(Check the webpage of the New York Times for Dewey's story. Make sure you get a better pictures of him by enlarging the wonderful photo of him being unshackled. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/29/nyregion/29towns.html>

FAITH BOOK

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today's Gospel reading:

Pilate said to Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?"...

Jesus answered,

"My kingdom does not belong to this world."

Reflection:

Jesus' kingdom, his world, is with us now. We have, through our baptism and the gift of the Spirit, been given the vision to see the presence of the kingdom and its life-giving possibilities. It is a world of community, equality, respect and dialogue. In the kingdom, under Jesus' rule, each person's gifts are recognized. The poor and neglected are empowered and no one is left out. Justice is given to each, regardless of their political influence, race, gender or economic status.

So, we ask ourselves:

- Who or what set of values rule my life and guide my daily decisions?
- What can I do to respond more fully to Jesus' rule in my life

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

"Jesus Christ...has made us into a kingdom"

(Revelation 1:5)

On this feast of Christ the King, we are called to abandon our fidelity to "earthly kings" with their powerful armies and messages of fear. We are invited to pledge our loyalty to Jesus, the image of our all-compassionate God.

Jesus' description of His Kingdom was simple: "*I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink, naked and you clothed me, sick or in prison and you visited me.*" It is by our own compassion, by reaching out to others and treating them as brothers and sisters, that we reflect the compassion and the love of God that became incarnate in Jesus Christ. *We are called to build "The Kingdom of God" here on earth,* a Kingdom which is judged by how the least among us are treated.

The Gospel is not only about our own individual goodness or charity. It is about our responsibility to help change social structures and national policies to make them more compassionate. **We must ask the Gospel questions and struggle to change the answers.**

- **Does our nation feed the hungry?** Or do we cut support programs in order to fund an ever-increasing military budget?
- **Does our nation welcome strangers?** Or are our immigration limits and laws making it more and more difficult for those seeking a better life to find one here in our country?
- **Does our nation clothe the naked?** Or do we support the sweatshops, which make the lives of the poor a misery while making cheap clothing more available for those who already have an abundance?
- **Does our nation care for the sick?** Or are health care plans and medical care available only to those who can afford it?
- **Does our nation visit Christ in prison?** Or as the nation with the highest percentage of its population behind bars do we ask why these brothers and sisters of Jesus come mostly from minority groups and situations of extreme poverty?

What can I do?

- **Read** the Gospel from the perspective of the poor.
- **Be Informed.** Advocate for "The Kingdom of God".
- **Pray** that "God's kingdom come" for all His children.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart

Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- Wesley Toby Smith #0765397 (On death row since 5/29/02)
- Quintel Augustine #0612123 (10/23/02)
- John Henry Thompson #0406487 (11/14/02)

Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, N.C. 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”

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