

## “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:

It is a sad fact that, in the history of the world, many kings and queens have not been satisfied with the boundaries of their own domain. Instead, they have launched terrible acts of aggression and acquisition on their neighbors for control of more people, land, power and wealth. Military conquests and scheming political maneuvers have been a way to fly one's own flag over wider areas and force allegiance from more and more subjects. Most often free choice was not even an option: to the victor belong the spoils.

Thus, the title of today's feast may initially turn people off. The world has seen enough rulers! But Jesus says to Pilate that his kingdom is not of this world. When Pilate presses him, "Then you are a king?", Jesus avoids the political implications in Pilate's question and chooses instead to identify himself as one testifying to the truth. If Jesus has "loyal subjects," if he is a king, it is because people have come to accept him as living and speaking the truth. People who speak and do as Jesus spoke and did, in fact, have accepted his truth and are part of his kingdom.

Today asks the question: to whom or what do we give our allegiance? Who holds dominion over us? What are we living for; what energizes and gives meaning to our lives each day? At what altars do we burn incense, and bend our knee in submission? What have we "enthroned" as our ruler—youth, money, convenience, addictions, career, etc.? What power holds sway over us? Calling Christ "king," invites us to accept his way of responding to the world around us. Where is the domain of his kingdom to be found?—wherever people are living his truth. Remember that in John's gospel the "world" has special significance: it refers to those who choose to live in darkness and falsehood, rejecting God's light and truth. Those who choose the "world's" ways opt to live outside the grace God is offering in Jesus. Today we are asked to turn away from the prejudices, aggression, competition and injustice of the world's rule and accept the truthful way that Jesus has shown us.

Jesus says his kingship does not belong to this world, otherwise, "my attendants

would be fighting to keep me from being handed over." There is a lot of fighting going on in the world right now; fighting over land, natural resources and property. If something has to be taken by force or by fear and intimidation, then such actions can't be of Jesus' kingdom. If we want to be servants of our king, if we want to spread his influence and rule, then we had better be acting the way he did—feeding the hungry, not robbing their lands or their resources; caring for the sick, not allowing more casualties from wars of aggression; loving our enemies, not building "smart bombs" to destroy them.

Jesus, the king, wins people over to his rule, not by force or intimidation. We see the truth in him and his ways, and we choose to take his rule in our hearts and minds. Some may come to him because other powers have been miserable disappointments--- money, drugs, alcohol, influential careers, power, etc. These people make a life-altering decision: they turn away from past power and turn towards Jesus. Others of us, born into the faith, and still practicing, also have a "turn" to make. We may be in a rut of religious practice, without the investment of our total hearts, minds and actions. Other powers still have strong sway over us; religion is just one of many loyalties we, in fact, profess. But, if in large or small ways, those other powers demand an allegiance that is not of the gospel, then we have adjustments we need to make.

Revelation, our second reading, reminds us that our only and true ruler is Jesus Christ, "first born of the dead," "the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty." This reading reflects the "Son of man" image from Daniel. Early Christians saw Christ as the fulfillment of Daniel's vision. We are told that "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him." All will recognize the Christ at his second coming, even those who killed and rejected him. For all the world's rulers, death is the bottom line. All die, power fades, luster tarnishes. Only One has passed through death and will die no more. While most have gained power only to lord it over us, only One ruler has loved us so much that he gave his life for us.

So, John, the author of Revelation, encourages us through his vision of the returning "Son of man". We are strengthened in our waiting. Despite the current injustices, wars, poverty, abuses of power and lies, things will not always be as they are. Our king will return, the one who is "Alpha and the Omega, "the beginning and the end." So, with this hope, we hold fast to our faith in Christ and continue the good works that were his hallmark in life and distinguish us as his disciples.

We don't want to miss what John says in the Revelation reading about believers. Christ, he says, "has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God...." Access to God is not limited to one High Priest, nor even to specially chosen ones. Rather, in Jesus' triumph over death and through his love for us, we all are now a royal priesthood in God's reign. This is what Vatican II affirmed; we are a priesthood of believers. Our daily lives and efforts for good in our families, jobs, among friends and in the world, are holy offerings to God. In addition, what we do here—how we live our lives in Jesus' service—makes God's loving and freeing presence visible in the world.

At our worship we pray in the "Lord's Prayer"--- "thy Kingdom come." We aren't just praying about the end of the world, Jesus' second coming. We are also praying for God's reign to be with us here and now. We know that something is seriously wrong in the world when 14 year old child soldiers in Africa are taught to kill and torture; when families are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty; when some of the elderly in our own country have to decide whether to buy food or use their meager resources for crucial medicine; when euthanasia is seen as a "solution" for the very old and infirmed; when natural resources are used without regard for future generations; when war is seen as a way to settle to differences, etc. The litany of woes goes on. All this certainly isn't the way God wants things to be for us. How do we know this? Because Jesus proclaimed a different way for us—the way God has always wanted it for us. By his words and acts Jesus revealed a dominion and power that look completely different from what we experience daily in our world.

Today, Jesus' words in the gospel remind us, "My kingdom does not belong to this world." With the king's words echoing in our ears, we spend time at this eucharist and subsequent days, casting an honest light on how we live. We ask, "Do the words I speak reflect my allegiance to Jesus' rule?" "Do these deeds show that I am a member of Jesus' priestly kingdom?" At this royal banquet we ask our sovereign ruler, the One who gave himself for us, to once again pour out his life into ours. Through his Spirit, we ask for clarity to see his ways and the will to follow them. "Thy kingdom come."

### JUSTICE NOTES

I'd rather be a naive fool than be cynical. I don't mind being called fool if I'm foolishly believing in a better world. It sounds cheesy, but why else be alive?

Honestly. What else is there? It's worth living to be happy, to have a nice house, to have a good marriage, and to raise kids, and I want to do those things. But the bigger question...what's the point of being alive if you're not hopeful that you can do a little something to make the world a little better?

----Greg Halpern, as told to Studs Terkel ("Making Their Voices Heard," HOPE magazine, November/December 2003, Number 40, page 16.)

[Greg Halpern was a leader of the Harvard Living Wage Campaign sit-in strike in 2001 on behalf of low wage workers at the University.]

### POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty."

Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to:.....

- Nathaniel Fair #0125241 (On death row since 5/18/99)
- Eric Call #0542384 (5/22/99)
- Keith Wiley #0654009 (5/27/99)
- William Anthony #0654093 (6/3/99)

-----Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”

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