

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” CHRIST THE KING (B)
Daniel 7: 13-14 Psalm 93 Revelation 1: 5-8 John 18: 33b-37

Dear Preachers:

The Israelite community did not fare well under its own rulers, nor the rulers of its occupiers. Their human rulers often failed them---kings were power hungry, ruled over dishonest courts and were influenced by wealthy land owners who defrauded the poor. (Who says the bible isn't a modern book!) The Daniel reading is set in a court scene--but it is a different kind of court. A divine agent of God comes from the clouds and receives rule over every nation.

Daniel was written in the 2nd. century, during the cruel reign of the Greek empire. This section is from a series of four visions depicting the defeat of Israel's enemies. At this moment of the vision, the “Son of Man” comes on the clouds. Israel saw this figure as representative of itself and envisioned a day when Israel would rule over all nations. The beasts in this section of Daniel originate in the world of evil; on the other hand, the “Son of Man” comes from the heavens. Evil has ruled over the people for a limited period of time. Note the hope expressed here, for this one from God will rule over all peoples, for all times.

In this first reading, we have a continuation of the apocalyptic literature we saw last week. It is a unique form of literature; one characterized by extreme images and strange creatures. The intention is to address a suffering people and help them look beyond the present moment of grief to a longed-for-time of peace. During persecutions people need a vision of the future to get them through. Remember the story of Victor Frankl, who lost his family in the Holocaust and was himself in Auschwitz? He looked into himself and saw his worth and found meaning to his life despite his circumstances. With this inner strength and vision, he survived when many around him perished. Remember too, the slaves in our own country who, in the midst of their slavery, sang hymns of hope, about someday being able to “fly away.”

Jesus will use this image of the “Son of Man” to describe himself. However, to the notion of a triumphant ruler, Jesus will unite the seeming contradiction of his suffering and death. If Jesus receives the “dominion, glory., and kingship,” mentioned in this reading, it will be as a consequence of his first accepting servanthood and even death. This is what makes Jesus' rule so unique. Earthly

rulers hold sway over others only during their lifetime and while they have the power to control. Jesus' rule is the contrary, it is in his dying that his rule begins, that he begins to hold sway over us. He doesn't rule us by force of arms, rather we surrender to his dominion by the force of his love for us. He has walked an arduous path and our love and admiration for his willingness to suffer for us persuades us to follow him and proclaim his rule over our lives this day.

As I write this, we still don't know who the next president of the United States will be. Just before the elections a foreign journalist suggested that citizens from the rest of the world should have a vote in our elections since the president of our country has influence over the whole world. (He also thought that most of the world took more interest and had more knowledge of our politics than many of our own citizens.) The president of the U.S. is the most powerful person in the world and hundreds of millions of dollars and huge amounts of human energy are expended to gain this office.

Suppose each of the two major candidates were to be asked a question similar to the one asked Jesus in today's Gospel: "Are you the president of the United States?" From the way the election controversy is going at this moment each would surely answer, "Yes, I am." "Absolutely, no doubt about it!" How many of us, conditioned from childhood to gaining power and authority in so many facets of our lives, wouldn't answer in the same way if the circumstances allowed? If such a question were posed in our society the line of those wanting the position would, as they say, extend around the block....and far beyond.

The conversation between Pilate and Jesus enables the author of John's Gospel to proclaim quite clearly that Jesus was a king with a rule that had its source in divine authority. Pilate is concerned that if Jesus were a king he might stir up a rebellion against Rome. As Rome's representative and ruler over Judea, Pilate could not risk a political disturbance under his rule. It's clear from the conversation that Jesus' rule is non-political, that he favors no political group. Jesus' rule is not over earthly territory and is not part of any human ambition. He will not rule over us by coercion, but by our interior acknowledgment that he is our ruler. His realm is not marked by territorial signs, border guards or fences.

We Americans claim we feel uncomfortable with this notion of kingship. After all, we won our independence by resisting the rule of a tyrant king, we threw him over and became free. Many of our ancestors came to this country to get away from

whims of kings and tyrants and the heel of oppressive force. The preacher calls us to remember that we are citizens of another realm, we live under a different rule and a different ruler. In following Christ, we leave behind any other power that has controlled us, to follow the one who sets us really free with a freedom no political realm can grant.

Does our life show the commitment we profess today to Christ as our King? As the saying goes, “If it were a crime to be a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us?” If we sense that there is a gap between the ideals we profess and the reality we live, then today is a good day to recommit ourselves to Christ and his ways. We can pray today that we hear afresh his message, take it to heart and let his reign form our lives.

The feast of “Christ the King” concludes our liturgical year. The day wraps up what we have been professing in word and ritual throughout these liturgical gatherings. We are dedicated to the Lord, and today we say “yes” to citizenship in his realm and profess our common belief: Christ is King. That should be our prayer as we pray the Lord’s Prayer together just before communion. We pray, “Thy kingdom come”, i.e., we pray that together our lives will better reflect what Jesus has in mind for us as a community of God’s people.

QUOTABLE

Pilate seems to miss the import of Jesus’ remarks; he heard the word “kingdom” and for him this is a political entity; and so he presses for a confession (37). Jesus will not categorically refuse to be known as a king..., but he indicates that he prefers to describe his role in terms of testifying to the truth. John has not portrayed Jesus as a preacher of the kingdom but as the unique revealer who alone can speak and show the truth about God. Jesus has no real subjects as would be true if his kingdom were like other kingdoms; rather he has followers who hear his voice as truth. Only those who belong to the truth can understand in what sense Jesus has a kingdom and is a king. The real reason that Jesus has been handed over to Pilate is precisely because he has borne witness to the truth: “The world...hates me because of the evidence I bring against it” (v.ii 7).

---- Raymond E. Brown, SS. THE ANCHOR BIBLE; THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN (XIII-XXI), page 869 .

ANNOUNCEMENTS

I got a note from Fr. Robert Konopa who asks for your input. Here is what he says:

I have a question for you. Christmas is coming rapidly. That means there is another Children's Mass to prepare. These Christmas children's Masses are a challenge for me. I certainly want to include the children directly in the service / in the homily. But doing the Christmas pageant is just too much hassle, i.e., there is not enough time to prepare the children and these plays/pageants are being done all the time through the school and seen repeatedly on tv, etc. It's really "nothing new".

Would it be possible for you to put out an "all points bulletin" to reel in some suggestions that your subscribers might offer that they have used and have been successful for Christmas children's Mass? One year I used a suggestion from a priest friend and it was both successful and meaningful for the children and the adults in the church. I would be glad to share it with others and receive ideas from others as well.

Let me know what you think about this. Or maybe you have some suggestions yourself where or how I might receive some suggestions.

Fr. R. Konopa

So, if you would like to respond to Bob's request and make some suggestions, drop me an email and I will add it to this section of "First Impressions." Jude (FrJude@JudeOP.org)

I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (Judeop@Juno.com)

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

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”

Jude Siciliano, OP

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