

I come in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we celebrate “Christ the King.” This feast has always bugged me. It seems so inconsistent. The image that comes to mind when I think of a king, is an authoritarian monarch, surrounded by princes and servants, reigning over a subservient population, providing military protection in exchange for compensation and obedience. Becoming king was either inherited, or taken by force. Kings loved to be feared! In ancient times, kings were often self-proclaimed gods, demanding worship and honor. They wore luxurious clothing, donned a golden crown inlaid with precious jewels. Servants catered to his every desire.

Thinking of Jesus as this kind of king doesn’t make sense to me. I do not see a power-hungry leader, but rather a king giving all power and glory to God the Father. He does not demand to be worshipped or honored, but rather proclaims the Good News, honoring God. He does not seek to conquer the world with an army, but rather win people over with love. I do see that servanthood was demanded, but not by the marginalized, but rather from leaders and the rich.

I do not see a luxurious palace, but rather one of starry skies, fishing boats, olive trees, and the houses of the poor.

Christ the King did not wear luxurious robes or a golden crown. He wore a tunic and ultimately donned a crown of thorns, inlaid with his precious life-giving blood. Our king did not exploit others, but rather gave of himself for the benefit of all. Our king did not push ‘undesirable’ people to the margins, but rather dwelled among them. Our king did not punish sinners, stripping them of dignity, but rather restored their dignity in love and forgiveness.

Then as I reflected on the readings, Samuel used the phrase “ruling in the fear of God.” Sometimes we hear, “in fear and trembling.” I don’t know about you, but it confuses me why I should fear God. Must I approach God in terror? Some say ‘yes’! Some say that God is so incomprehensible, that he must be approached with a sense of unworthiness and terror. It’s true that I am totally inadequate, but I’m not sure that is what I hear in our readings today. If Jesus came to deliver the Good News, how can living in terror be a response to that? In my mind, it just doesn’t add up.

Allow me to look at this from another perspective. When Samuel used the word ‘fear’, the Old Testament Hebrew word was “yirah.” It can be translated as “fear or terror”, but it can also mean “awe, wonder, and reverence.”

So, when I approach Christ the King in wonder and awe, it releases me from feeling terror, and inspires a sense of eagerness, anticipation, and joy!

Imagine walking up to God, in total and overwhelming amazement, feeling love that is beyond all comprehension, and trembling in a sense of being overwhelmed. Have you ever been so taken in by something that words and actions cannot describe the experience – a total and indescribable amazement?

Ok, so how can I be so sure! Maybe I'm all wrong. Maybe he meant terror.

In John's prologue, he says that the "In the Beginning the Word was with God, and the Word was God." A little further down, it says that the "Word was made flesh." If Jesus is the Word made flesh, and the Word was God, then logic tells me that Jesus IS God. And, in John's gospel (14:9), Jesus tells his disciples that if they have seen him, they have seen the Father.

Therefore, if I pay close attention to the actions of Jesus, I can get a glimpse of what God's are like. Did Jesus ever condemn anyone? No. He condemned actions, but not people. Did Jesus demand punishment for sins? No, Jesus offered forgiveness and invited repentance. Did Jesus ever strip anyone of their dignity? No. Jesus restored dignity. Did Jesus ever abandon anyone? No.

Jesus taught that the shepherd will seek out even one lost sheep in order to bring them back into the fold. So, that means that God will invite me and pursue me for all of eternity – if that's what it takes to bring me into his fold.

A prison chaplain shared a story about her experience with an inmate. When the chaplain prepared for a prayer service, the inmate was asked whether he/she would like to read a prayer. The inmate made it clear that he/she had no interest in it. Week after week, the chaplain would ask, and week after week the invitation would be declined. Nevertheless, she would always ask. Well, one day, when the chaplain asked, the inmate sighed and agreed to participate. The inmate has been praying with the group ever since. This, I believe, is how our Christ our King pursues us. We can decline his invitation as long as eternity, but our king will never stop inviting us. Our king will never throw up his arms in frustration and abandon us.

The fear of God? How about - how awesome is our God? In today's reading from John, Jesus tells Pontius Pilate that he is not a king of this world. I agree. Jesus is an out of this world king! And in the Book of Revelation? Wilfrid Harrington tells us, "This Jesus is, indeed, worthy of honor and glory. He will come, from the presence of the Father; none can hide from his presence.

He will be manifest to all, even to those whose hostility numbers them with those who had brought about his death. If he appears as Judge, it will not be to condemn. The gracious mercy of this Judge touches hearts: the tribes of the earth will lament in remorse.

We are assured that our God is the everlasting, the Almighty. We as Christians meet this awesome God in the one who laid down his life for us.”

So, as we conclude the Church year, we are reminded that this is Christ our King. The crown of thorns has been turned into the crown of glory through the Resurrection, when Christ conquered all evil, even death. We see a kingdom that is open all – everyone! This kingdom radiates the awesome light of Christ. Jesus, as king, intercedes for us and has made us righteous, worthy of everlasting life in His kingdom.

For us? We are called to face the light and walk towards the kingdom. Even if we choose to walk away, our king will pursue us and invite us to turn around. Our king will invite and invite, and wait for us to finally sigh and say yes.

May you have no fear! May you always be in wonder and awe of Christ our King. May you live with the assurance that you will never be abandoned by God! May you tremble in the awesome love and joy that is here for you now, and awaits you in eternal life. May you face the light of Christ, Christ the King. May you be radiant with the light of Christ today and forever more. Amen.