

CHRIST THE KING SOLEMNITY Nov 25, 2012

Readings: Dan. 7:13-14
Rev. 1:5-8
Jn. 18:33-37

On this last Sunday of the liturgical year I would like to make an adaptation of T. S. Eliot's famous last lines in *Four Quartets*' Little Gidding that seems appropriate to what we are celebrating today. 'What we call the end is often the beginning; for to make the beginning is to make the end. We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know JESUS for the first time.'

The scriptures for the last Sunday of the year and the beginning of Advent next week announce the same message about Jesus coming in glory to judge the world. As we end this one and will begin again another yearly liturgical cycle, we know we will never attain to the heights or plunge the depths of the mystery of the Son of God, made man. With each cycle we do not return to exactly where we were the year before. We spiral up or down by new levels of experience and new understandings of the ways of the world, the ways of God. Things have also changed by the choices we have made in the past year as to our goals and the ways of attaining them.

The Word who is God, who was with God in the beginning and at the creation, emptied himself to take on our humanity. In that assumed human nature he revealed by his words and deeds the divine plan for the redemption of the fallen world. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that those who believe in him might have eternal life (see Jn 3:16). Father Alban used to say, "If you can believe that the Son of God really became a man, all the rest is easy." The Son of God came in total obedience to the mission on which the Father sent him. As a man like us except for sin, he underwent suffering and death to help take away our fear of them. By completing his mission with his resurrection he obtained for everyone the possibility of forgiveness for sin, reconciliation with God, and a share in eternal life. He therefore deserves to be worshiped, served and honored as Lord of Lords and King of Kings,

His mission is completed but ours is not. It is to bring all things into obedience to Jesus, ourselves first of all, then those we can help to know him as their Lord and Savior. For as it says in the letter to the Hebrews, "At present we do not see all things subject [to him], but we do see Jesus crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, [having been] made for a little while lower than the angels." He does not exercise his sovereign authority and rights by force. We have the freedom to accept his saving power or not. Not many earthly kings and sovereigns strive to obtain the obedience of their subjects by love rather than by fear. In chapter 64 of his Rule, St. Benedict urges that the one chosen as the spiritual father and guide of the monks, the abbot, "strive to be loved rather than feared." From time to time we celebrate the lives of godly kings and queens who have made the list of the saints. They are the exception to the more far from noble example of royal persons. When Jesus heard the disciples arguing about which of them would be regarded as the greatest, he reminded them, "earthly kings lord it over their people ... [and like to be] called their benefactors; yet, it cannot be that way with you." (Lk 22, 25ff)

Israel's descendants certainly had their disappointments with their kings. It was when Samuel was nearing the end of his judgeship and was going to appoint his unworthy sons in his place that the Israelites first asked for a king. Why did they want a king? They wanted a king in order to be like the nations around them. They said they needed a king to rule them, to judge between them, to lead them in warfare and to fight their battles (1 Sam 8ff). With God's reluctant approval, Samuel anointed Saul, son of Kish, to be their first king. After him came David, a man after God's own heart. God promised David that his throne would stand firm forever occupied by one of his descendants. King David's example of faithfulness to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob became the standard for evaluating the reigns of his successors. In the long line of his heirs, only a couple, like King Hezekiah and King Josiah, came close to meeting that standard. The rest were remembered with blame for their idolatry and the abominable human sacrifices in imitation of their neighbors.

Finally in the fullness of time a Son of David came along who met and surpassed all of King David's achievements. Jesus, son of Mary, son of David, fought our battles against our real enemies and won. He defeated Satan and his minions by accepting all the humiliation, the scorn, the mockery, the pains of scourging and nails that brought on his death. What seemed to be the end was the beginning of a glorified life. He rose from the dead and took our human nature into heaven with his wounds of love. Even so not everything is subject to him yet. He has other enemies to conquer, among them ourselves in the mode of our rebellious, arrogant, independent self-centeredness. He appeals to us with assurances of mercy and with love. He thirsts for union with us the way we should thirst for union with him.

At his trial before Pilate, the Jews accused Jesus of claiming to be the Messiah and a king. (Lk 23, 1-5) When Pilate asked him if he was king of the Jews, he said yes, I am a king, but "my kingdom does not belong to this world." (Jn 18, 31.). His realm extends then beyond time and space, and not limited to the chosen people, Israel. It is universal. If he is a king and yet his kingdom is not of this world, of the temporal order, then where does he exercise his sovereignty? "The kingdom of God is within you?" Obviously, it must be in the spiritual realms of what we call mind and heart. The proper object of the mind is the truth, while that of the heart is love and union. Jesus told Pilate that he "came into the world to testify to the truth. Anyone committed to the truth hears my voice." (Jn 18, 17). He told Thomas, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

On another occasion he said to those who believed in him, "if you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples; then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (Jn 8, 31-32). Living according to his teachings is not about just obeying the letter of the law. That is slavish. We can live in accord with the law of the spirit because the risen Jesus sent his Spirit to be our advocate and guide us into all truth. When we live according to the Spirit's guidance, we are actually putting on the mind of Christ, and in that we are acknowledging Jesus' kingship over us.

Jesus made it clear that the greatest commandment is the law of love: love God and love your neighbor as yourself. He has planted in us aching hearts longing for union with another, with all others. We are made in God's image, we are made for love. We learn it best by our intimate relationship with him. To serve him is to reign with him. He wants to make us all together a royal nation of priests to serve our God. As we continue with

the Mass, uniting ourselves to both his sufferings and his victory, celebrating his glorious reign in heaven with the saints, let us work with him to that further goal which Paul described to the Corinthians: (1 Corin. 15), "When the end comes Christ must reign until all things are under his feet, even death. Then he will subject himself to the One who gave him that rule, so that God may be all in all."