

Christ the King (2014)

(Ezek 34:11-12, 15-17; 1 Cor 15:20-26, 28; Matt 25:31-46)

One of my favorite hymns is **A**Crown him with many crowns," and it certainly is appropriate for today's solemnity, because it is exultant joyful praise and because Jesus is our King under many titles. If you, too, like it, , be sure to come to for Vespers tonight, when you can join our community in singing it. Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Redeemer, is indeed King of Kings: King as Eternal Word, King as co-Creator of our vast universe; He has redeemed us for Himself as his people through His blood; He is the Messiah of royal David's line, awaited for many generations. Pilate may have written the title on the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews," to mock and to irritate the Jewish leaders, but I suspect he recognized the truth of it. The crown of thorns and the title on the cross may have been thought mockery, but when God raised Jesus from the dead He vindicated the claim to messianic dignity and royalty. We who believe, recognize Jesus as King not only of the Jews but of all the universe.

I have no idea when the term **A**King of the universe@ was coined, but it undoubtedly means much more to us now than it could have then. Now we know how the vast is this universe, containing billions of galaxies, each containing billion and billions of stars. Only relatively recently have we begun to discover planets other than Earth. Given the vastness of our universe, there are certainly millions of them, possibly billions. If that is true, statistically speaking, many would be in orbits a

moderately distance from their sun (star), so that life could exist, and intelligent life evolve. The Vatican acknowledges the possibility of life outside our Earth. All of these would be under Christ=s Kingship. We used to joke about the alien who says, **A**Take to your leader,@ now perhaps less jokingly, we inquire **A**Would you baptize an alien?@ Would we expect them already to have received revelation of the Christian mysteries? Or would we send them to the nearest RCIA program? I hope the question never confronts me!

More seriously, this solemnity comes as the culmination of all history. The liturgical year is cyclical: as one year ends another begins, so that next Sunday will be 1st of Advent. But history is not cyclical; it moves toward its conclusion, and unrolls according to the plan of God. Psalm 33 says: "The Lord foils the plan of nations,/ frustrates the designs of peoples./ But the plan of the Lord stands forever,/ wise designs through all generations." Individual prophets grasped parts of the plan. Nathan promised an eternal dynasty to David. Isaiah and Jeremiah saw and foretold the rise and fall of mighty empires and proclaimed that through these events God's plan was being carried forward. God declares through Second Isaiah: "At the beginning I foretell the outcome;/in advance, things not yet done./ I say that my plan shall stand,/ I accomplish my every purpose." Clearly the life and work of Jesus is the center-piece of that plan, and so the author of Ephesians can say: "In all wisdom and insight, [God] has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that

he set forth in [Jesus], as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth."

Our readings for today are very apt for this solemnity: in the first, the transcendent Lord comes down among His scattered sheep... to be truly a King by being their shepherd. An image Jesus later applies to Himself. In St. Paul's reading from Corinthians Jesus is shown as King by overcoming all enemies, those whole final coming of God's kingdom. In the gospel Jesus is presented as King and judge of all; but emphasis is not on judgment and punishment of the wicked; it insists rather on the behavior that must prevail in His kingdom. All members must care for each other: feeding and clothing one another, caring for one another: in other words, showing love for one another. Those who will not act so, have no place in His kingdom. We see this in the way Our Holy Father Pope Francis would lead us.

Scripture has many different scenarios for the final consummation, the end of human history. One scenario describes a cataclysmic Armageddon, another a universal judgment, another a vision of all nations flowing to Mt. Zion to beat swords into plowshares, another a vision of a new heavens and a new earth. This last scenario, which involves a transformation of creation itself, relates to what St. Paul speaks of in Romans: "creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption

and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God."

We may be tempted to point to the sad state of the world around us and say that no such plan is in evidence. But God's hand isn't always that evident. I think of Psalm 77, in which the psalmist looks at the evils of his day and concludes, "This is my grief, the right hand of the Lord has left us." But then he reflects upon days gone by, on the wonders God has worked for Israel in delivering them from slavery in Egypt in the events of the exodus; he recalls how God led them through the Red Sea, though (as he says) "your footsteps were unseen." We may continue to believe God leads us, even when "his footsteps are unseen."

None of the scenarios referred to are beyond the power of the God who brought all the mass and energy in our vast universe into existence in a fraction of a second; it is, rather, a question of what kind of scenario God desires and plans for us. And we can be sure that it is not the Armageddon beloved by the Fundamentalists. The last of the great OT messianic prophecies is that of Zechariah: "Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion,/ shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem!/ See, your king shall come to you;/ a just savior is he,/ Meek, and riding on an ass,/ on a colt, the foal of an ass./ He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim,/ and the horse from Jerusalem;/ The warrior's bow shall be banished,/ and he shall proclaim peace to the nations.

It is not for His power that God wishes to be known, but rather for goodness and love, mercy and forgiveness. While Jesus is King of the vast universe, most of it is too hot or too cold to sustain life. It is in the human heart that He wishes to reign. He could gather all together for a

fearful judgment but He would rather return to an earth that had willingly learned of Him, because He is meek and humble of heart, to an earth that had taken His yoke, because His yoke is sweet, and had taken His burden, because His burden is light. Should the whole world do this, His return would be received with joy by all, a world where all the swords had been beaten into plowshares.

We can hasten that day by choosing leaders who seek to accomplish ends through peaceful means, through international cooperation rather than going to war, leaders who would take the Messiah of Zechariah as their model, the Jesus who proclaims Himself "meek and humble of heart." And on the individual level we can promote Christ's rule and help bring His plan to completion by striving to live in peace with each other, crowning Him with many crowns in our hearts.