

Today is the Solemnity of Christ the King and the beginning of the last week of the Liturgical year. Next Sunday we begin Advent, the beginning of a new Liturgical year. That means you have just 33 shopping days until Christmas. But more importantly, during Advent we prepare for the birth of the new king. Then, throughout the Liturgical year we follow his life and teachings until we come once again to the Solemnity of Christ the King. Today we declare that Jesus is our king. But what kind of king is Jesus?

Here in the United States we don't have many ties to the monarchy. Kings and queens are just not part of our reality. But we can look to our British friends to glean some insight into kings and queens and their role in society. Although the monarchy in the UK is not what it used to be, a king or queen still has significant influence, power and authority in his or her kingdom.

The British love their queen and the royal family. Take for example, the birth of the new prince to William and Kate two years ago. People loved the prince before he was even born and all of the United Kingdom rejoiced at his birth. They were positively ecstatic. The entire kingdom was hanging on every news report, facebook post and tweet, waiting to see the new prince and to find out what he would be named. It was called "royal baby fever". Prince George was famous before he was even born. The royalty are celebrities in the UK, loved and watched more than almost anyone else. William and Kate's son, third in line to the throne, was born into wealth and fame.

We also know about the kings from biblical times, from the history of the Israelites and the history of early Christendom. They wielded enormous power over their subjects. They were political, military and religious leaders. Their actions were often self-serving and affected the lives of everyone in their kingdom, sometimes in good ways and sometimes in very bad ways. They were generally not accessible to their subjects. They were in a class of their own and they sought to be served rather than serve. Power and authority, fame, wealth and importance were their goals and their subjects suffered as a result. Some were so obsessed by power and position, they even ignored the rule of law and morality.

Now consider Jesus. His kingship does not fit these notions of a king. He was born into poverty and relative obscurity. Although the angels rejoiced at his birth, few on earth did. Quite the opposite, the existing establishment wanted to kill him from the beginning. Joseph and Mary were so poor they did not have enough money to procure a year-old lamb, the proper sacrifice for the ritual of purification. They could only afford a pair of pigeons to be offered at the presentation of Jesus in the Temple.

For thirty years Jesus lived a life as a simple carpenter, and when he did step into the public life he did so as one meek and humble, as a servant to fishermen, tax collectors and sinners. Through his ministry he lifted up the poor, healed the sick and reclaimed the lost. He would admonish people to not talk about the miracles he performed. He even commanded the demons he cast out not to reveal his authority, all because he did not want to be a celebrity.

Where earthly kings sought power and fame, Christ the King did not, he avoided it. The power and authority that Jesus exercised was much different from that of an earthly king. For Jesus, power was care and protection, everything from making wine at a wedding in Cana, to healing the sick, to dying on the cross for us all. He used his authority for the benefit of his followers. For Jesus, authority was service, from calming a storm, to casting out demons.

He was accessible to the common people. He was literally one of us. He came to serve, not to be served. He wants us to follow him and choose him as our king. He never commands our allegiance; he waits for us to surrender ourselves to his reign over us. He invites us to embrace the mission he establishes for us: to love God and to love one another. He gives us a vision of how to accomplish this mission: loving service to each other through feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned. He desires that we serve one another, not him.

In the Gospel today, when Jesus was speaking with Pontius Pilate, he does not directly answer Pilate's questions about being King of the Jews. It was not that he was trying to evade the questions, it was because it was so difficult for Pilate to grasp this truly different idea of kingship. Jesus was not the threat to Caesar that his accusers made him out to be. As King of the Jews he was not a subverter of the Roman Empire as a Gentile might expect. Nor was he a politico-religious liberator as a Jewish nationalist would hope. His kingship transcends both these ideas. That is what he was trying to help Pilate understand.

Jesus' kingdom was not of this world. Jesus himself said: *"The coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed, and no one will announce, 'Look, here it is,' or, 'There it is.' For behold, the kingdom of God is among you."*(Luke 17:21) The Greek preposition translated here as *among* can also be translated as *within*. Christ is the King of the kingdom that is within us personally and among us as a community. Through his victory, Jesus has opened to us his kingdom. He invites us to be members

of his kingdom where we will have the opportunity to live the vision he gives us as we accomplish the mission to which he calls us.

Last year Pope Francis, in his homily on the Solemnity of Christ the King, said that our job is *“the imitation of Jesus’ works of mercy through which he brought about his kingdom”*. (Pope Francis, 11/23/14) And if you listen to the Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer today, you will hear that it reminds us that Jesus’ kingdom is *“a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace”*.

What kind of king is Jesus? He is a king who serves his subjects faithfully and with compassion. He is a king who brings about his kingdom through his closeness and tenderness toward his people. He is a king who gives up his own life to save even his disloyal subjects. He is the King of truth and holiness, he is the King of justice and peace, he is the King of life and love. He sits on the throne of the cross and establishes his kingdom within and among us. He is our king, he is king of the universe, his is Christ the King.