

We have come to the end of another liturgical year, the last Sunday of Ordinary time. Next week we begin a new liturgical year and the season of Advent.

Today we are celebrating the Solemnity of Christ the King. It is not a coincidence that the celebration of Christ the King comes at the end of the Church year. The Church takes this opportunity to remind us what we have been celebrating throughout the year. Starting with Advent, we meditate on the most significant event of all time, since creation itself, the Incarnation of God as man in Jesus. Then the Church walks us through the life and teachings of Jesus. We pause to meditate carefully on his Passion, death and Resurrection during Lent and Easter, and then dig more deeply into his teachings throughout the rest of the year. All we have read, all we have pondered, all we have celebrated during the liturgical year leads us to this day where we recognize him as our King, and King of the universe.

But what kind of King was Jesus? When we think of kings, we think of them as rich and powerful, we think of them as influential and popular. Jesus was not like that, he was not like earthly kings. He did not have, nor did he seek, political power. He did not command an army. He did not want to be famous and he scorned wealth. Ultimately he was brutally executed at the age of 33. He was just a poor carpenter from an obscure little town in an oppressed little country. It seems almost absurd, by modern standards, for us to call him a king, much less King of the Universe.

But he is Jesus the Messiah. He is our Savior and Lord, who gave up his life for us. He is the one to whom “*every knee shall bend ... and every tongue confess*” as Lord. We have chosen him as our King. He is the one to whom we give all our allegiance. In fact, when we say, Jesus is the King, we are summing up the entire Christian message in those four little words.

The dichotomy between earthly kingship and Jesus' kingship is illustrated in the readings today. Our second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Colossians is one of the strongest statements about Jesus in the Bible. It is an ode about Christ which is reminiscent of the Prologue of John's Gospel and the early verses of Genesis.

It begins with Paul telling us that, “*Jesus is the image of the invisible God.*” That is a pretty amazing thing to say about a simple carpenter. God is invisible, but if you want to know what God looks like, look at Jesus. Jesus himself said, “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*”. In other words, to know Christ is to know God.

Paul continues, “*In him all things were created in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, through him all things were created.*” This is an amazing statement. Jesus was not created like the rest of us. But it was through Jesus that all things were created. The Son of God has been present since the beginning of all creation and he is responsible for all Creation.

To use John's language, he is the Word of God, and

*“through him all things came to be”*. Not just the material of the universe but, all order and truth. He is the author of all reality.

Paul goes on, *“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”* In other words, he is the organizing principle of all reality. The laws of physics, chemistry, mathematics, and the like, they all came from him.

When we study the world through science, according to Paul, we are looking at Christ, the Word of God.

Paul continues, *“all things were created ... for him”*. Another amazing statement. He is the purpose and goal of all reality. Not just our world but the entire universe, all was created for him.

And then, in case you had any doubts, Paul adds, *“For in him all the fullness [of God] was pleased to dwell”*.

However, there still are many in today's world that see Jesus as just a great teacher. But they are wrong. Jesus is himself, God! All of our worship, every Mass we have said, every reading we have proclaimed, every prayer we have prayed, has led us to this particular moment in the liturgical year, acknowledging him as our God and King.

In a few minutes we will proclaim this truth, as we do every week, when we recite our Creed: “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God”. We are saying that he is the highest, the King, the Word who governs all things, King of kings, Lord of lords, God from God.

Earlier I said it seems almost absurd to call this poor

carpenter, King of the Universe. When you look at today's Gospel you can see the paradox.

Here is this poor carpenter, turned itinerant preacher, nailed to a cross, as if he were a common criminal. He is in his last agonies before death. There is a brutal band of soldiers around him, who specialize in putting people to death in this way. His followers have all abandoned him. He is alone, stripped naked, being tortured to death.

And to make matters worse, as people walk by they mock him. They point and laugh, and they make fun of him. They are saying, "*He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Messiah*". The soldiers make fun of him as they come forward with their sour wine. The people shake their heads at this pathetic figure hanging there, alone, abandoned, forgotten, dying.

Yet, he is the one that Paul is talking about. He is the Lord of lords. He is the King of kings. He is the one in whom "*all things hold together*". He is the beginning of all reality. He is God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God. He is the image of the invisible God.

There is a sign above Jesus that proclaims, "*This is the King of the Jews*". But, our idea of kingship is someone who has power, authority and control. That is why the soldiers mock him saying, "*If you are King of the Jews, save yourself*". They are pointing out that Jesus has no power, no control, and no authority, because he does not save even himself. They think that being a king means being able to protect yourself from discomfort,

embarrassment and humiliation. Being king means you have people looking after you, protecting you, keeping you comfortable.

But Christ the King is not that kind of king, one who saves himself. He is the kind of King who forgets himself in love. He is not one who builds up his ego, but one who gives himself away. He is not one who fills himself up, but one who empties himself out. His power is found in his self-emptying love.

Take a close look at one of his last acts of love on earth. The good thief, after acknowledging his own guilt for which he is also being crucified, asks Jesus to simply remember him when he comes into his kingdom. What does Jesus do? Rather than just assuring him that he will be remembered, he promises him something far greater. He promises to take him to heaven that very day. Such is self-emptying love. Jesus in his final agony forgives this repentant thief and gives him what he offers us all, eternal life. Now that is real power.

You want that power in your life? Stop trying to save yourself, save somebody else. Stop trying to protect yourself, reach out, love and protect somebody else. You want to live in the power that makes the whole universe? Perform the simplest acts of love. Then you will become a loyal subject of Christ the King, and you will have discovered the secret to real power.