

34th Sunday of Ordinary Time /Feast of Christ the King Cycle A

II Samuel 5:1-3

Psalm 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5

Colossians 1:12-20

Luke 23:35-43

Robert P. Hagan, O.S.A.

A couple of Decembers ago a friend of mine, named Pat, and his son took part in a "toys for tots" campaign in the inner city. The idea was that needy families would write a list of some of the things they might need or want around the holidays, and other people would receive these lists, shop for the items and deliver them to the families. Pat and his son had spent all day Saturday and Sunday going around delivering various items to poor families all over the city. As they were completing one of their last stops, they were walking toward the front door of an apartment building, when out from behind a dumpster came a very disheveled, foul smelling woman, in a tattered dress with a very red weather beaten face. She peered into the back of Pat's truck, and looking at the packages in his hands, she asked: "What are you doing?" Pat answered: "We are passing out these items to those families who sent in a request letter...but I'm sorry we don't have anything for you this time as all these packages are accounted for on our list." The woman very softly replied: "No, I don't want anything, I was just wondering if I could help." Pat has said that he was never so moved by a misjudgment on his part, and often hears those soft words: "I was just wondering if I could help."

We all have our own ideas about what successful people look like. We have preconceived notions of the kind of people who are in a position to help us. We have a picture in our head of how people with power should act and carry themselves, and even though we do not live in a monarchy we have a sense of what royalty is. Presumably, the closest most of us will get to a king in this country is "Burger King." However, we can still conjure up images of kings: male rulers who govern nations, with mighty warriors at their disposal, who rule with power, authority and action. This is a king as we imagine a king should be, and in many ways this is the type of king the Jews were awaiting to lead them to freedom.

So on this great feast of Christ the King, we recognize the great irony. There were those expecting a messiah, a powerful, mighty warrior king, and then this person Jesus showed up. We acknowledge that even today we can be searching for a particular kind of king, a particular kind of God. As God speaks to us in many ways through the life of His Son, and the words of scripture, we can begin to lay our preconceptions aside and let God show us what a king is. Let God show us who God is.

In the Gospel we discover Jesus, who does not live in luxury or comfort, but rather experiences the worst suffering, mockery and abuse this world can offer.

We see Jesus, the very Son of God, who time and time again gave to others, gave of Himself without counting the cost, without concern for appearances, and recognizing that living in such a way would cost Him His life.

Jesus entered this world for a purpose and hung upon the cross for this same purpose. He endured pain for our sins...for us. Behind the pain, the blood, the sweat, the agony, the non-retaliation... was love. Jesus was indeed a king. He was the king of love.

Kings bore the responsibility of protecting their subjects. They were to deal wisely and enable people to live in security. This is God's promise to us, and it is fulfilled in Christ the King who has rescued us from sin and death. This is a king who shares the hopelessness of our human situation, but through love shows us that with the grace of His spirit, we will find hope. This humble king, often anonymously working in our world, helps us discover the faith and strength that overcomes every obstacle.

When we face difficulties in life, we can all be like the thief next to Jesus, exclaiming: "Show your power, if you're such a great person. Save us from this fate if you are such a great king."

We are tempted to place all of our trust in human efforts, ourselves, our friends, popular opinion. Power and worldly success too often hold greater value for us than participating with the suffering Son of God on the cross.

Jesus Christ the King shows us what Saint Paul told the Corinthians: Jesus came through "the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."

The other thief was one who believed. He began to see behind the dirt, grime and apparent foolishness, the saving power of Jesus Christ that is always present and among us. He was able to see in this beaten, dirty, bloody man... the power of love... someone who was just trying to help.

In faith he makes his request to the king who can grant all: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

This person recognized that Jesus was king. Through faith he saw that even his own sins could be forgiven and prays: "remember me with mercy and grace." Jesus spoke as the king that he was, granting pardon, peace and paradise. He reassures us of this truth every time we sit at His table.

We receive His body and blood in the sacrament that tells us we have everything on our wish list. We have the love of our God and full and free forgiveness, not just in the heavenly kingdom that awaits us, but in His kingdom here on earth.

Let us pray that we see Christ the King in this world, even through our crosses. That we recognize Him in the presence of all those around us... That we refuse to walk past or dismiss Him, and hear Him when He asks us ask us daily: "I was just wondering if I could help."