

Feast of Christ the King

We hear in today's gospel, "And they placed a sign over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

Since Jesus did not deny that he was a king,

- The Sadducees mocked him and said they have no king but Caesar**
- The Pontius Pilate mocked him and had him clothed in a royal robe and crowned him with thorns.**
- The soldiers at the cross mocked Jesus and said "If you are the King of the Jews, come down from that cross."**

The gospels give us two different reads of meaning of Jesus' Kingship, especially in the face of death. For many it he was simply someone to be mocked and played with. The final insult came from a criminal who was hanging next to him on the cross.

This thief sees his own life about to end. The criminal, useless and powerless in the face of his own death, sees death much as the Sadducees, Pontius Pilate and the soldiers. He sees death as the end

of life. He hangs next to Jesus on the cross mocks Jesus saying “Are you the Christ? Then save yourself and us.” Get us **DOWN** from here!

But the other criminal who is being crucified with Jesus sees death very differently. He experiences his death as embraced by the life of the person who hangs next to him.

- He has been listening to Jesus.
- He hears Jesus say “Forgive them Father for they know not what they do.
- He hears Jesus express his total trust in his Father “into your hands I commend my spirit.”

For the second thief, he recognizes that death has no power over this man. This second thief turns to him and says “Remember me when you come into our kingdom.”

This thief is coming to understand that Jesus does not see death as the end of life.

Jesus sees death as one more stage of handing over his life into the hands of the one he calls Father.

Jesus responds to the second thief, “Today, you shall be with me in Paradise”

Yes, here is a very different kind of king.

A different kind of Kingdom.

(pause)

You shall be with me in Paradise.

This word “paradise”. What does it mean? In the time of Jesus, “paradise” was a Garden in the inner courtyard of a mansion.

The word “paradise” also is in the Genesis story where Adam and Eve first lived. They lived in perfect harmony with nature, with each other and with God. Yes, that is a very different kind of kingdom than the Sadducees, Pontius Pilate or many of the early followers of rabbi Jesus were looking for. In this kingdom there is no royalty, no pomp, no great wealth or power or prestige, just a place and space where people live at peace with God, each other and nature.

(pause)

Story of man moving to assisted living. Only regret is leaving the faith community. For him, it was a bit of paradise. For him it was a

community where he experience a bit of peace with God and with others committed to establishing God's Kingdom.

All too often the kingdom we seek focuses on power and wealth and prestige.

Can I ever be president? Can I ever be in the president's inner circle? No, I don't share those connections, the power, the education? And even if I become president, it is only for a fleeting moment and is fraught with difficulties.

Can I ever be rich and famous? Probably not. And if I am, what have I sacrificed in my personal values to attain those riches. (story of my rich uncle who made his money bootlegging during prohibition)

Is there a sugar daddy waiting out there for me to make all my dreams come true? Most of us can sadly answer that question by now.

But those of us who choose Jesus as our King, our Leader, the one to whom I pledge my allegiance, as the King and Lord of life,

- **Power is not his hallmark, but in his compassion for the sick and alienated.**
- **Prestige in this life does not mark Jesus' journey, but healing those who are broken in body and spirit,**
- **His wealth is not measured in silver or gold, but in sharing the riches of the good news of the Kingdom.**

**In our secular world, wealth, fame and success are central to the kings and queens and the famous,
but compassion and trust mark those whose king invites us to be with him in Paradise.**

We need to choose which kingdom will be ours; which king we will serve.

May we have the courage and wisdom to choose the one which alone can conquer even death itself.