

Thirty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (year C 2007)
Solemnity of Christ the King

Luke 23:35-43

At the threshold of Advent we celebrate

- the kingship of Christ
- Jesus as king

The Church invites us to gaze upon Christ in this way, i.e. *as our king*,
before we enter the season of expectant longing that is Advent.

Advent turns us towards the two comings of Christ: the First and the Second.

Why this particular emphasis on Christ as *king* at this time?

Perhaps because Christ

- was king from his birth
- will return as king

The important question that thus arises quite simply is:

“What type of king is Jesus?”

This important question rephrased is:

“What is Jesus’ purpose in reigning and how does he reign?”

This gospel passage, at first glance and upon first reading,
does not seem to shed much light.

The gospel presents to us Jesus in what seems to be a particularly *weak* moment.

Gee, thanks!

Kings are supposed to be *strong*, and when they are being disrespected,
they are supposed to manifest their kingship by stopping the disrespect.

In Jesus’ place, we would have shut the mouths of those jeering – *permanently!*

Jesus is being challenged, as in the temptation in the desert, to show power;
three challenges to manifest his divinity (*as those challenging understand divinity*):

“Dude, God is omnipotent. Show some power!”

How does Jesus respond?

With the Devil, Jesus’ only weapon is Scripture.

With the rulers, the soldiers, and the criminal neighbor, Jesus is silent.

What?!? Wait!!! Is Jesus weakening with time? Is His mission unraveling?

This is, in fact, unexpected revelation, which takes us well beyond our categories.

None of us spontaneously think of kingship in the way in which we see it in Jesus.

Like the rulers and the soldiers and the criminal

we think of *power* when we think of a king.

It is here that we ought to make

a very important, very fundamental distinction between *power* and *authority*,
a distinction that will enable us to see

- how much Jesus is really a king, is *the* king
- how much Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world

Power is external.

Authority is internal.

Power implies forceful coercion.

Authority is a loving service with a view to a greater end.

In the realm of the truly human, as in the realm of the divine,
power is relative to authority.

Those with authority lead to an end that transcends them.

The powerful, in the end, lead to and serve themselves.

Let us consider two examples of genuine authority from human experience
so better to understand:

1. **parents** lovingly serve their children's greater end, i.e. their growing personhood, and must sometimes use power to achieve that, i.e. say "no" and/or punish.
2. **politicians** are normally *public servants*, i.e. serve the common good of their constituents, the political community, and, in so doing, create a forum for personal happiness. Sometimes power must be used to protect the common good, e.g. setting apart a member of the community who is a public danger. When a politician's personal agenda intervenes, we have the corruption of authority into power.

Interestingly, analogously, the same order exists with the divine.

God's omnipotence, God's power is at the service of His love.

All that Jesus does, therefore, is with a view to loving – more and more.

And if Jesus is loving through whatever may be happening – as weak as he may appear,
then Jesus is truly being king, Jesus is truly reigning.

At the Cross Jesus reigns. And how!

Jesus welcomes all that happens in *apparent* passivity.

Do not be fooled: Jesus is very deliberate, very willful.

Jesus is *actively* loving.

Jesus is not primarily teaching us here that we ought to be meek, and grin and bear it.

When necessary, Jesus manifests power.

He *powerfully* overturned the merchants' tables in the Temple
and *powerfully* expelled them! (John 2:13-22)

The Cross is the communication of love.

Exteriorly speaking, it is a failure and a defeat.

Interiorly speaking, Jesus succeeds, Jesus is victorious.

At the Cross Jesus reigns.

Let us not misread.

Otherwise, we will fall into the error of many Christians

who misread, and consider the Cross the unfortunate, necessary passage

("Oh well, he had to pay the debt; there was no way around that one."),

and breathe a deep sigh of relief with the Resurrection.

How linear! How temporal! How confusing authority with power!

Jesus died because he *chose* to die, because it was *fitting* that he die.

I will never forget an incident back in college, during my church-hopping years.
I was attending the Christian Missionary and Alliance church in Derwood,
and had convinced my parents, who knew no better theologically, to do the same.
One day my father innocently asked the pastor, Pastor Lane,
why there was no corpus on the cross in the church.
He was accustomed to seeing one in Catholic churches.
Pastor Lane responded with apparently flawless logic,
“Because Jesus rose from the dead”.
It sounded good to us, and so we ran with it for a time.
But, *over time*, I gratefully discovered this other insight,
that of the mystics of the Christian tradition
(one that I pray take hold of me more and more).

At the Cross Jesus reigns. At the Cross Jesus pours forth His love.
And he does so

- such that death be emptied of its power
“Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting” (I Corinthians 15:55)
- such that he rise from the dead

The Cross and the Resurrection are two sides of a same mystery of love.

The Resurrection is not the victory over the Cross.

The *Cross* is the victory, a victory manifested in the Resurrection.

This is precisely what we read in the Scriptures:

“We were reconciled to God through the *death* of his Son.” (Romans 5:10)

“Through the *blood* of Jesus, we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary.”
(Hebrews 10:19)

Jesus is glorified at the Cross, i.e. overflows with love,
and that glory is then communicated to his body for resurrection.

If this is true, and we are joined to Christ,
then our lives are *tremendously hopeful*.

We reign in Christ.

Indeed, at Baptism, *we* became kings and queens.

By grace, we participate in the very life of God.

We, therefore, become vehicles for/instruments of divine love
– *even in and through our suffering*.

Although, humanly speaking, we seek to eliminate suffering,
we must know, in faith, that God allows suffering

because, somehow, mysteriously, a greater good, more love, can come about.

When we pray, “Thy Kingdom come”,

- we choose to allow Jesus to reign freely,
and thus to meet us and love us there where we think loving is impossible
- we embrace Christ in the mystery of the Cross

Let us welcome the King and enter into the victory of love...