

Christ the King, 2017  
St. Mary's Catholic Church, Richmond VA  
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The priest started to preach. And, frankly, his homily was boring.

The church was full of people, gathered for the Funeral Mass of a woman who had touched the lives of many people. She was a woman of deep faith, a woman who seemed to spend every waking moment doing things for others.

And now, "Monsignor Nyquil" was putting us all to sleep, with a homily that appeared to be nothing but random thoughts.

But then... he started talking about this woman's life: her work in local jails, her visits to the sick, her generosity to the poor. And the priest said, "*Her life only makes sense because Jesus is real.*"

"Yes," I thought. "Yes." If Jesus isn't real, then her life makes no sense.

The priest wasn't boring any more. He said,

"Think about. She was accepted to medical school. But she turned it down because she felt the Lord calling her to go to Africa for a year of ministry.

"And when she got back, she was offered a high-paying job. But after praying about it, she took a low paying job with a non-profit.

"Think of it: her brother was murdered, but instead of being full of hate, she felt called by the Lord to start a volunteer ministry in local jails.

"Think of it: she raised three of her own children and adopted two special needs babies, because, she said, the Lord would give her enough love to bless all of the kids.

"Think of it: when her husband, the 'love of her life,' died... she was strong, because she had an even deeper love in her life. Jesus."

*Her life only makes sense because Jesus is real.*

By popular standards, her life was not much of a success at all. She *could* have been a doctor.

She *could* have been wealthy. She ended up in a tiny old house, with almost *nothing* in the bank.

But... *the church was full!* She had decided that Jesus is SO REAL that she was going to *see* him in everyone, *look* for him in everything, *serve* him in every possible way. A full church because of a full life.

Today is the Feast of Christ the King. In some places today, there are actual kings. Some of those kings are figureheads. Others are monarchs in every sense of the term.

In centuries past, many people lived under the authority of a king or queen. Back then, when the Church referred to Christ as a 'king,' everyone understood what that meant.

But in modern America, kings seem like distant relics. They are safely at arm's length.

And yet... in our culture, we still call people a king. We have the 'muffler king,' the 'mattress king.' We have a Burger King. Elvis is 'The King of Rock.' Michael Jackson is the 'King of Pop.'

We may admire some of those kings, but none of them have power over us... *unless we give it to them.*

So, what does it mean when we say that Christ Jesus is our king?

Maybe the boring priest at the funeral was giving the best explanation about what it means when someone says that "Christ is king." That priest was describing a woman who saw Christ in everyone, and served Christ in every way, and looked for Christ in everything.

Jesus was the love of her life. Jesus guided her life. Jesus' wisdom shaped the choices of her life. Jesus was her hope and her strength and her reason for living. Her life, literally, made no sense without Jesus.

Isn't that a great description of what a life looks like when Jesus is in charge?

In today's famous Gospel passage, Jesus has a chance to summarize his Gospel message.

As Jesus describes the final judgment, he speaks of sheep and goats. Both groups were surprised to learn that they had encountered him. "When did we see you hungry, or naked, or sick or in prison?" When did we see you, Lord?

The king says, "Whatever you did for one of the least brothers or sister of mine, you did for me."

That truth that will change our lives if we take it seriously.

Jesus chooses to identify with every human walking the earth. “Whatever you do for the least, you do for me...” The Son of God is telling us that he is present in every son and daughter of God. Even the ones I don’t like. Even the ones I’ve been taught to hate or fear. Christ is already in them. And Christ is already there loving them. Our call is to see Christ in them, and let him love them through us.

I recently had dinner with someone who just got back from the middle east, where he had volunteered to work close to the fighting, bringing medical supplies, fresh food and water to people who are in desperate need.

He got criticized by some people – ‘why are you leaving a great job to go over into that craziness?’ Why? Because he had prayed about it, and knew that Jesus was telling him to go.

Others criticized him – “why are you taking medicine to Muslims, Kurds, non-Christians? Why are you loving people like that?” And his answer? “Because Jesus loves them, and Jesus is in them. And I’m just there to love them like he does.”

*His* life only makes sense because Jesus is real.

We may not like the language of “kings” and “monarchs,” but you know what? Something, or someone, controls your life! We may not like to be called ‘servants,’ but you know what? We give our lives to something, whether we realize it or not. Something controls your life.

Some of us are controlled by fear. And because of that fear, some of us seek safety with more guns, and some of us wish there were no guns at all.

Some of us are controlled by a loss of hope for our future. So we turn to politics, thinking that the next election will finally set things right. Does it ever?

Some of us are controlled by anger. We listen to Satan’s lies, which tell us who we are supposed to hate, who we shouldn’t like or trust. But anger simply begets more anger, and exhausts us.

Life only makes sense because Jesus is real. But if we don’t recognize that we find fulfillment by seeing Christ in every person and loving every person as Jesus already does, then we are forced by our emptiness to seek meaning in human ideologies which never lead to joy.

Yet that is what we do. And the effects are staggering.

In the name of fulfillment, we empty our wallets, we work so much that we are strangers to each other, we eat too much and then wonder why our deeper hungers are still there.

In the name of diversity, we become dividers.

In the name of tolerance, we teach young people to fear anyone who says something they don't agree with.

In the name of empowerment, we teach generations how to be victims.

In the name of entertainment, we put electronics into the hands of babies, isolating them and robbing them of human interaction.

In the name of compassion, we never tell each other the truth.

In the name of living a good life, we deprive the unborn of life.

In the name of getting ahead, we pass judgment on those who have fallen behind.

In the name of justice, we call for harsher treatment of God's daughters and sons who have sinned.

We are all controlled by someone, or something. We all serve something. Our lives are shaped by some guiding force, some core reality.

The sheep and the goats were surprised to learn that the King was present in every person. The saved and the damned were stunned by the fact that God loved people so much, and wanted us to love them the same way.

*They* were shocked and stunned. But we've have 2000 years to read this Gospel passage and put it into practice.

Apparently, many of us still haven't made that decision, because we still choose to serve other rulers in our lives.

But every once in a while, we meet someone who *gets* it... and *does* it. We meet someone who is striving to see Christ in everyone, to love everyone because Jesus does.

*That's* what it means to say that 'Christ is King!'

Wouldn't it be wonderful if, at our funerals, the boring priest would say, "his life, her life, only made sense because Jesus is real."