

Homily, Feast of Christ the King, Year C

Today is the Feast of Christ the King. What image comes to your mind when someone mentions the word 'King'? For me, I think of crowns and rich robes, attendants, soldiers and subjects. He has a staff in his hand. I think of worldly power, a strong fighting force. If that is the common perception of a "king" then Jesus Christ hardly qualifies because all of these could not be found with this King we are talking about today. He was a man with no jeweled garment, no worldly power, no army and a man who trusted everyone. Today our King is hanging on the cross with two thieves. The first thief just wants Jesus to get him off the cross, do something for me. The second thief wants Jesus to remember him.

At the sunset of life, God is not going to ask us how powerful we were, how popular we were, how wealthy we were. At the sunset of life, the Lord is only going to ask us one question: "How much love did you put into the world?" the mark of Christianity is in giving and people who cannot give do not become richer. This feast is an invitation to all those who have power or authority of any kind to compare their use of power or authority with Jesus. Are they using their power for the building up of a more just society or to feather their own nest?

A retired teacher decided to volunteer at a local hospital and tutor some of the children who were going to be there for an extended period of time.

She was given the name of a 9 year old boy, named Jimmy. She called Jimmy's teacher at his school and got the assignments which his class was studying- nouns and verbs. The teacher brought all the material with her to the hospital.

When she arrived, she found out that Jimmy was in the burn unit. For those of you who don't know much about burn units, the sights and smells can be overwhelming. The teacher almost turned around and went home, but she gathered up all of her courage and went inside and introduced herself to Jimmy. He was not a pretty sight and he wasn't responding well to the treatment.

She said, "Hi, Jimmy, my name is Mrs. Smith and I'm going to be your teacher for awhile, until you can return to school. Today, we're going to learn about nouns and verbs. It's very important that a person knows how to speak and write properly". After the lesson was over, she told Jimmy that she'd be back in a few days.

Two days later, Mrs. Smith received a phone call from Jimmy's mother asking if she would be coming to the hospital that day. Mrs. Smith thought that she had done a poor job with Jimmy and that the mother was calling to tell her not to come back. "Oh no", said Jimmy's mother, "On the contrary. You have it all wrong. I don't know what you said to my son, but, since your visit, Jimmy has been really trying hard to respond to his treatment. It seems like he has finally decided to live.

When Mrs. Smith returned to the hospital, she found Jimmy with his therapist and his mother. Jimmy said to his mother, “Now I know that I’m going to live. They wouldn’t send a teacher to teach me nouns and verbs if I was going to die, if I was a lost cause, would they”?

And, God the Father, wouldn’t send his only begotten Son, Jesus, Christ the King to be exact, if we are a lost cause. He wouldn’t let his son die a miserable death on the cross for us if he didn’t know that some of us would call out to him, as did the good thief-“Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom”.

Many of us struggle with the basic fear, “Will I be remembered after I’m gone”. We try to leave our ‘mark’ while we’re still here.

Jesus, our Lord and King, will remember us and love us for eternity. That is the great hope of today’s gospel for us.

This unnamed man, known only to us as the ‘good thief’, is dying for crimes which he committed. How many people did he swindle or rob? Who knows? He didn’t know much about Jesus, when he asked to be remembered. Basically, his future hung in the balance. This ‘good thief’ knew somehow that his eternal future hung on his faith that Jesus was exactly who he said he was-the Son of God. We are that thief, aren’t we? All of us are sinners, maybe neither better no worse than that thief on the cross. There is hope for people like us. Just a prayer away is the mercy of Christ-just one prayer away.