

Christ the King
11/20/2022

A DIFFERENT TYPE OF KING, A DIFFERENT TYPE OF KINGDOM

Earlier this year we mourned the passing of Queen Elizabeth II. While we pride ourselves on not having a monarchy, still, as an English speaking country that emerged from British colonies, many of us still feel a sense of connection. Her funeral was not only a fitting tribute to her life and work but a glorious display of pageantry. Although she fulfilled the role of a constitutional, not an absolute, but a constitutional monarch well—with duty, dedication, class, smile and even faith, the kingship of Christ that we celebrate today is different.

Jesus is a different type of king, different even from good earthly kings and queens. His is a different type of kingdom. We have an interesting choice of a gospel today. As we celebrate Christ the King, we don't have Jesus rising triumphantly from the dead, nor transfigured in glory nor even working a miracle. Instead, we find him at hour of his apparent defeat and humiliation. He is a king, crowned not with jewels, but with thorns whose throne is a cross. A king whose court isn't fawning subjects but mocking religious leaders, insulting soldiers and blaspheming thieves. A king who in agony, insult and humiliation speaks of forgiveness and mercy. A king who doesn't save from suffering but through suffering. Who teaches that there is something redeeming about suffering. A king who leads us from life through death into new life.

This kingdom is different. It's where the powerful don't get it but where a dying thief steals heaven. We share in this kingdom when we share in the mystery of the cross. In our baptism, we shared in the death and resurrection of Jesus, in his paschal mystery. Our life in Christ consists in growing in that mystery. In the Eucharist, the saving action of that mystery is made present to us so that we may live it more fully. And by our death, we will enter into it even more deeply.

We enter this kingdom when we leave behind human glory: power, prestige, dominance and money and remain faithful to the vision of God. It is a counter-cultural vision. A kingdom where we seek to live lives of intentional faith in Jesus and the power of his crucified and risen kingship. Lives that are self-giving rather than self-seeking, even if that self-giving leads to the cross. We share in this kingdom

through lives marked by forgiveness and mercy, even for our enemies, even unto death.

Jesus is a shepherd king like David before him. By God becoming human in the person of Jesus, by the mystery of the Incarnation, as the Israelites said to David, so we can say to Jesus, *Here we are, your bone and your flesh*. Christ the King lays down his life for his sheep and there have been others who have followed in his footsteps.

It's surprising for many people in this country to know that during the 1920s in Mexico, there was one of the fiercest persecutions of the Church since the time of the Roman empire. Churches were closed. Priests, religious and lay people were killed. The faith was outlawed. Miguel Agustin Pro was born in Zacatecas, Mexico in 1891. He joined the Jesuits and was known for his depth, his humor, his prayer life and his jokes.

In 1914, the political situation was already bad and he had to leave Mexico and continue his formation in California, Nicaragua and Europe where he was ordained a priest. Finally he returned to his native Mexico and within days the persecution of the Church flared up again.

In great danger using various disguises, sometimes as a fine gentleman, sometimes as a worker, he visited the faithful in secret to serve them and to celebrate the Mass and other sacraments. In time he was arrested, accused of a crime he did not commit, condemned to death without evidence and without a trial.

On the day of his execution, someone was outside the compound with a stay of execution but the commandant would not let that messenger in although he had hired a photographer to record what he thought would be the death of a cowardly priest. Before his execution he knelt and prayed and then refused a blindfold. He told his executioners, *Know that I am innocent. With all my heart I forgive my enemies*. With a crucifix in one hand a rosary in the other, he extended his arms like Jesus on the cross. As the order to fire was given, he cried out, *Viva Cristo Rey—Long live Christ the King*. Today he is Blessed Miguel Pro who followed Jesus, a different type of king, into his different type of kingdom.

Although today's gospel takes us to Calvary, we know that in the kingdom of God, Calvary isn't the end. If it was, then the leaders, soldiers and the other dying thief were all right. We know that God's kingdom is something more.

By our lives and by our death, not only with our words but in all that we do, may we always witness to our different type of king as members of his different type of kingdom.