

THE CALL OF THE KING

On April 18, 2005 in what would be his last homily as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, spoke of, a *dictatorship of relativism*. This coming from a man who grew up under a real dictatorship. He described that dictatorship of relativism as one that:

...does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's ego and desires. To say that there is nothing definitive is to say that there is no truth or at least no objective truth.

The gospel on the celebration of Christ the King takes us not to the magnificence of the resurrection; not to glory of the transfiguration; not even to a great miracle but, to Jesus as a prisoner before a leader of a very powerful empire. Despite all this, in John's passion account Jesus is the one in charge. Pilate asks Jesus a question and Jesus responds with a question to Pilate. When Pilate asks, *Then are you a king?* Jesus replies, *You say I am a king.*

But then Jesus goes on. He speaks of his mission which is to testify to the truth. The truth of who God is and the truth of who he is. Soon in one of our prayers we will hear Jesus' kingdom as one of *truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace*. To testify to the truth is to realize that there is such a thing as truth. In the very next line that follows this passage, Pilate asks Jesus, *What is truth?* It's as if Pilate was a relativist. Truth is the basis of civilization and an organized society, civil or religious. Without truth, people will suffer and those most likely to suffer are the most vulnerable.

At times we may be uncomfortable with the idea of objective truth. If something is true, it can make demands on us. But some things do in fact exist, pleasant or not, they exist. We can wish World War II didn't happen but wishing doesn't change the fact that it did happen.

To follow Christ the King is to follow one who says, *I am the way, and the truth and the life*. To be part of his kingdom is to acknowledge that truth exists, truth

is real, that objective truth matters. Even more deeply, it means to realize that this truth has a name and that the name is Jesus. Elsewhere Jesus says, *you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*. There is a unity of truth and freedom and we all have an image of it literally within ourselves. It's called your stomach.

The stomach secretes enzymes that work to break down and digest food. Question. Why does the stomach not eat itself up? The answer is that there is lining along the inside wall of the stomach that lets the enzymes out while protecting the stomach itself. Scrape away that lining and the stomach starts to feed on itself.

Freedom is like the stomach and the truth is like the lining. Scrape away the truth, and freedom turns cannibal. Unmoored from the truth of the human person, freedom easily becomes oppression where the poorest and the weakest will suffer the most. The past and the present both give us examples of people being denied their autonomy, their personhood or even their humanity. The Dred Scott Decision and Roe vs. Wade are just two examples and throughout history you can find a number of others.

To follow Christ in truth can be scary. It can call us to let go of pretensions, pride, defensiveness and so much more. It calls us out of our own ego and desires. It calls us to give up not that we may have less but that we might be more, that we might grow in the freedom of the children of God. One contemporary spiritual writer has noted, *Real freedom does not mean being ruled by one's impulses.... Just the opposite. Being free means not being a slave to one's moods*.

St. Ignatius Loyola would lead people in a meditation entitled, *The Call of the King*, where they would first imagine, a good and worthy human king who invites others to share in a great endeavor inviting his followers to *join with me, work with me, watch with me, share in the toil with me and share in the victory with me*.

Next St. Ignatius ups the ante asking people to imagine Christ the eternal king who calls the whole world to join him in an even greater work saying that *whoever wishes to join me must be willing to labor with me, that by following me in suffering he may follow me in glory*.

Jesus is a different type of king with a different type of kingdom. To acknowledge the kingship of Christ is to allow him to be the governing factor in our

lives. It is to allow Jesus not simply to make *a* difference in our lives but to make *the* difference in our lives. To follow him is to join with him in generous love and openhearted service. At times it will involve sacrifice, enduring persecution, and, Jesus is clear about this, possible martyrdom. Yet in all of this we grow in truth.

To deny that there is objective truth is dangerous and the evil one is also known as the father of lies. Jesus comes to testify to the truth and goes so far as to describe himself as the truth. To follow Christ is to acknowledge that there is truth, that there is objective truth even amidst a dictatorship of relativism.

In all of this, with lives of intentional faith, nourished by the Eucharist, we follow Christ the King through Gethsemane, through Calvary, to the glory of the resurrection, to the glorious freedom of the children of God. In truth, are you willing to follow the call of this different type of king into his different type of kingdom?