

## **Christ the King**

Cycle C, 11.24,19

2 Samuel 5:1-3; Colossians 1:12-20;

Luke 23:35-43

### **NOT ONLY TO LOOK...BUT TO REALLY SEE**

Henry David Thoreau once said: *"It's not what you look at that matters; it's what you see."* The scriptures for today, the feast of Christ the King of the Universe, invite us to examine what we see when we look at a crucifix.

A poem by an unknown author called "Eyes of Faith" says:

I wrestled with the Lord in prayer;  
all day, all night, I wrestled there;

And then as morning streaked the sky,  
the Lord bent low and made reply:

'This thing you've asked, dear child, of Me,  
is there for eyes of faith to see;

the eyes of flesh will not believe  
what eyes of spirit can perceive.

Reach out and take it, child of Mine;  
this thing you've prayed for, it is thine.'

And sure enough, my lifted gaze  
beheld the heavens all ablaze;

the newborn sun its glow unfurled  
across a breathless, waiting world.

I could not yet the answer see,  
but in the very depths of me,  
a gentle 'knowing' took control,  
and peace embraced my quivering soul.

That's why today each time I pray,  
I know the answer's on the way.

I do not place undying trust  
in what I see with eyes of dust;

thank God for eyes of faith, He cares!  
And still is busy answering prayers."

We focus today upon Jesus, whom we call our King, but who seemingly is not victorious but rather suffocates and in agony dies nailed to a tree. But paradoxically crucifixion is Jesus' enthronement! His crown is not bejeweled

and beautiful, but ugly and prickly with thorns and drops of blood. As emperor his fine garb was probably nakedness, as was the custom for Roman crucifixion, even though modesty has usually provided depictions his crucifixion with at least a loin cloth. His body was not beautiful at the moment but swollen and bloody and bruised from beatings and whipping. He is surrounded by people who are not singing his praises but were taunting him. He is revealed as our king in all of his weak, messy and bloody existence as a human being. Is this what we see?



Isn't it amazing that one of the two criminals crucified with Jesus could somehow see him as a king about to enter into his reign? We usually imagine a monarch elegantly ruling from a raised dais, crowned in luxury and surrounded by willing servants. Yet look at the crucifix. What do you see? He had been rejected by the religious leaders of his religion and deserted and even betrayed and renounced by his closest friends. The Roman soldiers mocked him. How could the one dying criminal see in this other dying man someone who was soon to reign victorious over sin and death?

Romans generally did not crucify people for something like jaywalking. It is probably safe to say that the two criminals crucified alongside Jesus were not the most gentle and sweetest of folk. The Gospel says the one reviled or berated Jesus, and even

while recognizing what Jesus had already been able to accomplish in his healings, feedings and resuscitations, he urges Jesus to employ that same power and save himself and save both his crucified companions. Which one of us, dying in agony or watching a loved one die would not or has not had that same plea on our lips?

The other dying man saw something more. Somehow he recognized that Jesus was the Messiah the suffering servant who came to serve rather than to be served. Jesus freely gave his life as a ransom and while as God he could have gotten off the cross, he did not spare himself. He chose in love to die for us so that the reign of sin and death would be ended. His resurrection shows those of us with eyes of faith that love is stronger than death. Somehow one of those revolutionaries crucified with Jesus was able to see this, even while he himself was dying on a cross.



Jesus was not born a king in the sense that he was in line to inherit a throne. He was more in line to inherit a hammer and a lathe. He was something like his ancestor David the shepherd boy who was the least likely candidate to be anointed as king. In our first reading David was accepted as king by all twelve Jewish tribes. After Saul had died in battle David had been

recognized as his successor and crowned as king by the two southern tribes. But the ten northern tribes had crowned one of Saul's sons as their king. But Saul's son got into a dispute with the general of their army which ended in death for both of them and then the ten northern tribes also came to accept David as their king. Jesus was not exalted because his challengers or anyone else died. Ultimately Jesus was exalted because he loved without counting the cost.

The second reading today tells us that he is the image of the invisible God. Jesus makes God visible. Jesus makes God real and concrete.



At our baptisms we were anointed as priests, prophets and kings. We share in the priesthood, the prophetic role and the kingship of Christ crucified. Perhaps if we truly allow Jesus to be our King, to reign in our hearts and in our lives, truly reign and determine the choices we make, all of us could live together as saints. Perhaps if we will receive the gift of faith we, too, will be able to look at the crucifix and see in a bloody, broken, dying man the triumph of love. Perhaps if we will believe Communion will help us to become the image of the invisible God. Perhaps if we live Jesus, live with Jesus as our King, because of his passion, death and resurrection we will live forever with him in his kingdom. May God be blessed.

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