

Homily – Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King - 22 November 2015

2 Sam 5:1-3, Col 1, 12-20, Lk 23, 35-43

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be with you this morning for this wonderful gathering. What has been a tradition of many years of gathering fathers and sons is broadened this year to include wives and daughters. In a year which saw a second synod on the family, and a continuing challenge from Pope Francis to families to live generously for each other, it is a good thing to come together in this way. It gives a singular opportunity for a celebration of faith and family on the occasion of a beautiful feast in which we remind ourselves that Jesus, Shepherd and King, Judge and Redeemer, is the center of our lives. The relationships we celebrate today in this gathering are really among the primary ones of our society. They are family relationships, and they remind us of our human dependency. As children we need parents to care for us, to form and guide us in life, to provide for us. Parents teach us love. But such dependence goes the other way as we mature. We trust that, as the need arises, those who have been formed in love, and in its duties, will themselves reach out and care for those who have taught them such love when the help of children is needed to care for parents and grandparents. We live, therefore, in a continuum of love and care. Family life and love, as well, prepares us for the world in which we live. We learn love in family, and we see ourselves called by Jesus to bring that love into the world. We do it with the confidence that He, who is our Shepherd and King, is strengthening us and helping us at each stage of life.

Our feast day today, and our Scripture give us a real opportunity to think about our lives in these terms, and help us to know what Jesus is calling us to be and to do. Today we are asked to honor Jesus as King, Christ, Our Lord, King of the Universe. In placing Jesus as King before us this Sunday the Church reminds us that He is the center of our lives, as Scripture says, “Yesterday, Today and Forever”.

We could, of course, well ask. What does being a king mean to us? We pride ourselves on living in a democratic Republic. We left kings behind in the countries our parents and grandparents left to come here to America. This is true but let's not be too fast to move beyond the term. It does mean something to us.

In the Gospel today we find Jesus before Pilate. It is the trial before we move towards Calvary and the crucifixion and death of the Lord. In this scene Jesus does not really seem much of a king but he is very much the king. The scene that we witness here in John's Gospel is one we see each Good Friday. There is so much to look at in the Good Friday readings that we might miss any particular scene. So, let's examine this scene. Pilate is obviously the person with all the power in this story. He is the one who will pronounce life or death for Jesus. Those accusing Jesus of crimes against God could not themselves pass a death sentence. That was reserved to the Roman governor.

It is likely that Pilate never met anyone else quite like Jesus. Pilate would have been used to deference. Jesus responds to Pilate as an equal. He engages him in conversation. Throughout the Gospel of John, the evangelist gives us stories of conversations between Jesus and others he meets along the way: Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman at the well are two good examples. In each of these cases the person talking to Jesus is changed from the conversation. The change is usually a conversion. The people involved decide they will follow the Lord. That is not the case for Pilate but the scripture does tell us that he was unsettled by his encounter with Jesus.

What is important for us to note is the exchange that takes place. Jesus wants Pilate to know that his kingdom is something altogether different than Pilate's. Pilate should not see him as a political threat. The Roman governors were stationed all over the empire to make sure there was no insurrection, no attempt of people subject to Rome to rebel or attempt to choose another form of government. It was a kingdom supported by force and power. Jesus standing before Pilate shows a different kind of

power. Political power is not the only kind of power. In speaking to Pilate Jesus tells of this power. “For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” His truth is the truth of God. And he is proclaiming it even as he stands before Pilate, alone and abandoned by his followers. It is not Pilate’s truth, one based on force and fear, cruelty and indifference, disregard for the rights of others. Jesus’ truth has nothing to do with ruling territories and armies, or control over any subjects. That was Pilate’s kingdom, one which continues to exist in our world today.

The truth proclaimed by Jesus is his teaching that God is love and wishes to establish in the world a kingdom of love. It is not power and force that God uses to establish his kingdom. It is love. That love is shown in Jesus, and nowhere more eloquently than here before Pilate, symbol of worldly power. Jesus shows his love, even to the end. Pilate has his centurions. Jesus has love. Jesus shows us in his own life that loving others is manifested in serving others. Even as he waits for Pilate to pronounce sentence on him, how is Jesus dealing with Pilate? He has a conversation with him inviting him to see the truth that he came to proclaim. Perhaps that was what so unsettled Pilate. In the end, Jesus’ death on the cross is his gift to those he rules. He gathers God’s people in his kingdom by an act of total love. The unifying force of God’s kingdom, shown to Pilate, and us, by Jesus, is love.

In his conversation with Pilate, Jesus ends with the words, “everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice”. Insofar as that love roots itself in the hearts of those who seek to follow him, the world will be a different place. The kingdom of God will bear much fruit as the love of God is brought into the world by those who are followers of Jesus, members of his kingdom.

In our first reading today we find the people of Israel looking forward to a kingdom which will gather the people into one. Daniel, the prophet, looks ahead and sees “one like the son of man” who would “receive dominion, glory and kingship”. This would be good as “all peoples, nations, and languages serve him”. Such a king would unify

not just a family, a tribe, or even one nation. He would gather together all people, keep them in peace, and permit them to live in their families and till their fields.

The Scripture is full of such prophecies. They point to a human need. We believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of that desire. Jesus came to show us another way. He would be king, but not the selfish way in which so many worldly kings had been, and not just of one tribe or group of people. He would be king of the universe, and all the people who call it their home. He would do something that God had wanted from the time of Abraham, to gather all people together and make a people.

That is the king we find in conversation with Pilate in the Gospel today.

From him and, from what he does for us, we learn of our relationship with God. We learn from Jesus that we are loved, we are created in the image and likeness of God. That is gratifying and a reason to be grateful.

But we also learn that we are called to live as Jesus did. We strive in our lives to look at the world in which we live through the eyes of Jesus, eyes of love. When we do we know that it is not only “me” who is created in God’s image. It is everyone I interact with each day.

We serve one another because we believe that that is the way we make the world a place which reflects the love of God. We begin that responsibility in our families seeking ways in which we can put the other first, we can look out for one another. Jesus has shown us a love which is eternal, and he calls us to live in that love gratefully sharing it with others in the many good programs, activities and individual acts of kindness that make our families, our communities, our parishes, and our world a better place to live.

Such an experience of love begins in our homes. It is there that we learn it as we see husband and wife, father and mother caring for each other and their children. It has to find its way into our world as well. We live in a very difficult time. The terrorist

attacks in Mali, in Paris, in Lebanon and in Baghdad these last weeks make us very uneasy. Contrary to easy rhetoric, that does not give us permission to determine that we are going to deny the human needs of any one nation or group of people.

Terrorism terrorizes everyone. That is its purpose. Our purpose is to hear the message of the Gospel and put it into action – love one another. Try to lessen the burden of those who are oppressed. Think of this as we talk about immigration and excluding some people from our country. Our own leaders need to put into place proper safeguards when dealing with refugees but we cannot turn our backs and close our doors on people who are no less victims of the terrorism that frightens us all.

Jesus has shown us his kingly power today in his conversation with Pilate. He speaks to us of truth. That truth is the reason for his coming into the world. That truth is love. He calls us to follow in his way – working to build and sustain relationships based on mutual love and respect, and always recognizing the need for mercy and forgiveness in our human condition. He invites us to use our gifts to help and encourage, and heal and give comfort. If we do, then as we celebrate this Feast of Christ the King, we will find ourselves citizens of the same kingdom Jesus came to establish because we are the bearers of his truth – God is love.