

## Homily – November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – Solemnity of Christ the King

On this last Sunday of the Church’s liturgical year, the Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe, we have a couple of readings that are as bizarre as last



Sunday’s readings. The first reading from the Book of Daniel and the second reading from the Book of Revelation fall under the category of “apocalyptic” readings. You may have heard the word “apocalypse”; it means revelations. Some truth,

hidden until now, is about to be revealed. The word “epiphany”, one of the Christmas feasts, also means revelation. What is revealed is something good, not something frightening or ominous. After all, God is the one doing the revealing. Our job is to open to the revelation and to stay open to the hope it is trying to bring us.

The Book of Daniel may have been written 600 years before the birth of Jesus. At that time, Daniel was a teenager and was deported along with his family, friends, and all the leading citizens of Judah to Babylon. They were to give up their homes, their livelihood, their country, their religion, and even their lives if they did not go along. (In 1755, the Acadians experienced the same thing). Daniel wrote the Book of Daniel to encourage his fellow Jews not to give up hope. He writes that kingdoms—cruel kingdoms like the Babylonian

kingdom—come and go. This, too, will pass. What they are to do instead is to put their hope in someone in human form, who is coming with the clouds (he's coming from heaven), and whose dominion is an everlasting dominion.

That second reading, from the Book of Revelation, is also apocalyptic literature. Like the Book of Daniel, Revelation was written during troubling times. It is the first century, and the Church is trying to get on its feet. The Roman emperor, Domitian, unleashes ruthless persecutions upon the Early Church. It survived miraculously by the intervention of the Spirit and by the witness of those early Christians who were willing to give up their lives. All of the Book of Revelation is written in code language so the enemy, the Romans, wouldn't be able to understand it. It was written to give people hope in the midst of senseless suffering. John, the author of Revelation, promises that this Jesus who was raised to new life will return in glory and his dominion will last forever. Almost the same words Daniel wrote 700 years earlier.

The Feast of Christ the King of the Universe came about also during troubling times. It was the Franciscans in the 1920s who urged Rome to mark this as a feast day. After WWI the world was in a mess. Kings in Europe were destroying one another—all in the name of Christianity—and the Franciscans realized we need a bigger pattern. We needed something that would hold Christian civilizations together, something bigger than dictators, corrupt governments, and endless wars where there are no winners. We needed a King unlike any earthly king who could bring a peace the world could not fashion on its own. We needed Christ, the King of the universe. We need one who would take on

our suffering and transform it into peace instead of spreading more vengefulness.

Although we would never wish suffering upon our worst enemy, suffering has a way of deepening us, making us long for healing and meaning. Suffering has a way of rearranging our priorities and makes us re-evaluate what is really important in life. People who have suffered something and come through not bitter or angry or blaming, have something to say to me especially when I'm in the throes of my own suffering. They speak from a place of experience.

Someone who has experienced cancer treatments can speak from a place of truth and hope to someone about to undergo treatment. Someone who has struggled in their marriage can speak from a place of truth and hope to others who also struggle. Someone, who once struggled to find a decent job, can speak truth and hope to someone worried about how they will survive financially. It's almost like they are saying, "Because I came through, you can also. Whatever was in me, is also in you."

I believe that Jesus is the great revealer. He says as much as he stands before Pontius Pilate just hours before his crucifixion. He tells us that his ultimate reason for coming to earth and living among us was not to perform miracles, not to heal, and not to start a new religion. "I came into the world to testify to the truth; for this I was born." He reveals to us the truth about God and God's wonderful plans for humankind. We don't always want to hear the testimony of Jesus' truth. Pontius Pilate didn't. Jesus said, "**Everyone** (not just Catholics) **who belong to the truth listens to my voice.**" If that gospel had gone just one more line longer, we would have heard Pilate sarcastically

dismiss Jesus by saying, “What is truth?” In other words, “Don’t be so naïve, Jesus. Truth has no place in the world of power and politics, in the world of money and influence.”

Pilate, when confronted with the truth, doesn’t want to hear it. It reminds me of a saying; you’ve probably heard variations of it. “I would rather live with questions without answers than answers that cannot be questioned.” When we live solely with answers that cannot be questioned, we cut ourselves off from a deeper truth that has something good to offer us.

Speaking about cutting ourselves off, think about Jesus on the night of the Last Supper. When the Supper is ended, he goes to the Garden of Gethsemane where he prays and is arrested. As he is being arrested, Peter draws his sword and cuts off the ear of the servant of the High Priest (Lk. 22:50-51). Jesus says, “No more of this!” and heals the man’s ear. Jesus has spent his entire ministry giving people ears to hear, he is not about to start taking them off now. I believe this episode really did take place, but the symbolic meaning is that the beginning of violence coincides with the end of dialogue. When we stop listening to each other, when we stop hearing the truth, it isn’t long before the swords come out. Unfortunately, that still seems to be the way of much of our world.

The truth, that Jesus came to reveal to us, is something already within us, for he said, “The Kingdom is within you.” This truth in a nascent form, much like a seed. Its potential is enormous. It’s there, but it’s in an immature or hidden form. Notice in Jesus inaugural speech, the first thing he says publicly. He doesn’t say, “I am the light, I am the light, I am the light. Get it in your heads

that I am the light and start worshipping me.” He doesn’t say that. Instead he points to the deepest part of us and says, “You, are the light of the world.” He saw something already within us that none of us notices on our own. Jesus is both the revelation of the truth about God and God’s love for the world and he is, simultaneously, the revelation of the truth that is within every human heart. Anyone—Catholic or not, Christian or not—who is truly seeking the truth will, inevitably, hear his voice.

Fr. Ron Rolheiser once wrote, “As we know, while perfect truth exists, we cannot know it perfectly. We have truth in part, in small pieces. That is why we need to be content to live with a lot of mystery and humility” (Sacred Fire, p. 267)

In the end, truth isn’t an idea or even an ideal. It is a person, Jesus, the King of the Universe.

**Fr. Phil**