

Reflection on the Solemnity of Christ the Anointed One

Sunday, November 24, 2024

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This last Sunday of Ordinary Time, the last Sunday of the liturgical year, is known to us as the Solemnity of Christ the Anointed One. And to much of the Roman Catholic Church, the Solemnity of Christ the King.

Many of us have long held a negative reaction to the word king because of its long history of patriarchy and abusive power, not to mention absolute corruption. And now, suddenly, it feels like we are entering such an era.

In Jesus' time, the people of Israel were subjected to great oppression from the Roman Empire. It was a dark time for the Hebrew people. King Herod and the Romans regulated all aspects of Jewish life. The only real way to get out of poverty, fear, and persecution was to work with the Roman oppressors, though that meant that they were then working against their own people. And many of the priestly class, the scribes, and Jewish authorities, knew how to get along and even thrive by working with the Roman occupiers. The people who were suffering greatly hoped for a just king. In this context, the ministry of Jesus began.

Through these past months of ordinary time, we've walked with Jesus and the apostles as Jesus worked to bring a new way of being in that corrupt world. We witnessed many healings. We witnessed profound compassion to all, from all walks of life, even from perceived enemies. We witnessed Jesus standing up to power and practicing nonviolence. We met the Gospel Jesus.

Jesus brought a new way to live: reconciliation, not punishment. Love, not hate. Peace, not violence. Turning the social order upside down by lifting the lowly. Jesus brought a whole new covenant. This was so threatening to the powers.

After death threats, Jesus was handed over to Pontius Pilate who interrogated him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus knew that a horrible death was near. Jesus preached such a radical way of being that very few had any foundation to understand this. Even the disciples often could not comprehend what Jesus was talking about, let alone Pontius Pilate.

The way of Jesus was not understood, was too dangerous, too threatening.

Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, of blessed memory, a prophet, put it thusly, "they murdered Jesus for confronting those in power, for not accepting the status quo, for breaking their unjust laws, for riling up the people, for giving hope to the poor and vulnerable."

Yes!

Jesus spoke truth to power. Jesus showed us the way of love, truth, and peace. Gospel Jesus, not King Jesus. He defied the kingdoms of the world that ruled by authoritarianism, greed, violence, or the superiority of one nation over others.

In this, we are called each day to a radical resilience and a radical justice—for ourselves, our communities, for *our nation*.

How do we respond to the needs of these times when it seems as if people are hungry for a king who could save them from their perceived fears and despair? Reasserting Christ as king over the politics of this world seems an appealing solution to many. This is the goal of Christian Nationalism, which has an agenda where Jesus as king would cast out migrants and others deemed unworthy and is deaf to the cry of the poor or cry of the earth. Loving one's neighbor is not a feature of this agenda.

On the other hand, many people are fed up with patriarchal religion, and don't need another Alpha God before whom all must submit. We who carry in our hearts the Jesus of justice and eternal love, are reaching out to them with our Gospel Jesus who speaks truth to power and healing for our premonitions of doom.

As we begin this week of Thanksgiving, this time of coming together with loved ones in these dark times of wars, climate catastrophes, polarization, massive uncertainty and fear of what is to come, we may have a hard time this year feeling gratitude. Let us fight despair this Thanksgiving. Gratitude is the gateway to Advent.

May we walk into this holy season of Advent with Jesus, who is, who was, who is to be, the Alpha and the Omega, the Cosmic Christ that lives in our hearts. So may it be.

Reflection on Jn 18:33b-37

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