

Christ the King Sunday-November 20, 2022

Introduction to the Day—In 1925 Pope Pius XI saw nationalism as an existential threat in the world. He set aside this day as Christ the King Sunday. Today we hear talk about Christian nationalism, White nationalism and in some countries theocracy. These expressions are equally dangerous and make this last Sunday of the Church year an important one. Whom do we trust with our future and our lives? Where does our loyalty lie? How does the way we live reflect our prayer, ‘thy kingdom come, thy will be done?’

Luke 23:33-43

33When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing. 35And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” 36The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” 38There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” 39One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” 40But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

SERMON

The interim time between the death of Queen Elizabeth the second and the coronation of Charles the Third has more than a few folks speculating on the ways monarchy might change. No matter how you slice it, kings and governments are complicated—the results are mixed.

May I remind you that Israel struggled with the concept? Some feared that a king would abuse power and God would become subordinate to the king. Others were sure that without a king, their security as a nation would be lost. Spoiler alert—Israel decided to have kings...some were pretty good. Others were a disaster.

Such was the history and heritage of those who mocked Jesus when the Romans singled him out to show what happens when you mess with the Empire.

Rome did irony pretty well if gruesome is your taste in irony. The inscription above Jesus’ head as he was lynched read “King of the Jews”. Emperors don’t cotton to competition.

What's more, Jesus status becomes a punchline. Note how the preaching professor Dr. Debra Mumford unpacks it for us: Far starters, Roman citizens or even kings from other nations would never be crucified. The ghastly ritual was designed to humiliate one person and intimidate the rest. Dr. Mumford goes on...*even if Jesus somehow ended up on a cross, as a person with authority in those days, He would have had the power and influence to secure his own deliverance. So, they likely mocked Jesus because it was obvious to them that Jesus could not have been the person some claimed him to be.*

Jesus doesn't plead for his own life—the crowds are right when they say he saved others—Zacchaeus, countless people who were sick, tormented and oppressed and those on whom society turned their back.

Jesus lived the words he read in synagogue—words Luke quotes and that you've heard in more than one sermon lately....

18 *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.*

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

When Jesus read those words, he declared that they were fulfilled TODAY even as you hear them. On the execution grounds, when one of the rabble Rome's Empire rids itself of asks for mercy, Jesus once again announces, TODAY. Today, you will be with me in Paradise.

Roman emperors had the power to take life. Jesus....Christ the King has the power to give it. Temporal rules love power. Christ the King uses power to love.

It's not every day the legendary rock guitarist Jimi Hendrix gets quoted in church yet his words are as on point as his fret work was virtuosic:

"When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace,"

Sounds like that's what the Kingdom of God is all about and all creation gets saved in the process.

