

Our Paradoxical King

Homily for November 25-26th 2017

The full title for this Feast Day is paradoxical. "Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe".

The Oxford English Dictionary defines paradox this way:

A seemingly absurd or contradictory statement or proposition which when investigated may prove to be well founded or true.¹

A paradox is used to challenge the mind and make you think about the statement in a new way. A paradox is often used to intrigue and question common thoughts. Take the statement "Less is more." This statement uses two opposite words that contradict one another. How can less be more? The concept behind this statement is that what is less complicated is often more appreciated.

In Shakespeare's "Hamlet," the title character states "I must be cruel to be kind." On the surface, once again, this statement does not seem to make much sense. How can an individual convey kindness through cruelty? In this case, Hamlet is speaking about how he plans to slay Claudius to avenge his father's death. His mother is now married to Claudius, so, of course, this will be a tragedy for her. However, he does not want his mother to be the lover of his father's murderer (unbeknownst to her) any longer, so he believes the murder will be for her own good.

Similarly, how can we say that Jesus of Nazareth is the King of the Universe? A man who taught publicly for only three years, traveled no farther than Calgary to Sundry and who was crucified at 33. How can this man be the King of the Universe? We hold that this paradox is true based on another paradox:

Jesus is the Man who is also God.

Here is a seemingly absurd or contradictory statement. Before becoming a Christian, St. Paul, thought this Christian claim the grossest blasphemy. However, when investigated he discovered it to be not only well founded or true.

He tells us as much in 1 Corinthians 15:

In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

The Resurrection, while not obvious to most because they can't see that it is immediately evident, is the basis for our title: "King of the Universe".

Because everything in Paul's life was governed by the fact of the Resurrection, it changed the way he looked at history. Paul understood time is linear and progressive and is moving to a climax. As history unfolds Jesus is at work subjecting his enemies to his rule. The time will then

¹<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/paradox>

come when the last enemy, death, will be destroyed. When this time arrives Paul states that history will have reached its climax:

When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.

There will be this ultimate singularity where God will be all in all. This Kingdom, which was ushered in on little planet earth will have universal influence. How we live the allotted decades of our earthly life has consequences for how we will participate in this universal kingdom.

Now I find this paradox one that is more than I can fully comprehend. What is easier to comprehend is how the profession: “*Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe*”, has clear ramifications for how we live now.

Pope Francis has observed:

The starting point of salvation is not the confession of the sovereignty of Christ, but rather the imitation of Jesus’ works of mercy through which he brought about his kingdom. The one who accomplishes these works shows that he has welcomed Christ’s sovereignty, because he has opened his heart to God’s charity.²

To open the heart to charity is the way we most emphatically witness to our belief in Christ’s sovereignty. However, today, like two thousand years ago, accustomed to seeing the signs of royalty in success, power, money and ability, we find it hard to accept such a king, a king who makes himself the servant of the little ones, of the most humble, a king whose throne is a cross. A king who says he is most present in the vulnerable and hurting. This is indeed, another paradox.

And yet, the Scriptures tell us, in this is the glory of Christ revealed; it is in the humility of his earthly existence that he finds his power to judge the world. For him, to reign is to serve!

We discover in our Old Testament reading and in the Gospel the way to open our hearts to charity and so follow the example of our Universal King.

He is the Shepherd, of whom the Prophet Ezekiel spoke in the First Reading (cf. 34:11-12, 15-17). These verses are interwoven with verbs which show the care and love that the Shepherd has for his flock: to search, to look over, to gather the dispersed, to lead into pasture, to bring to rest, to seek the lost sheep, to lead back the confused, to bandage the wounded, to heal the sick, to take care of, to pasture. All of these are fulfilled in Jesus Christ: he is truly the “great Shepherd of the sheep and the protector of our souls” as celebrated in Psalm 23. (cf. Heb 13:20; 1 Pt 2:25).

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Those of us who are called to be pastors in the Church cannot stray from this example, if we do not want to become hirelings. In this regard the People of God have an unerring sense for recognizing good shepherds and in distinguishing them from hirelings.

The Church is the community of care and compassion described in Ezekiel because we understand this to be the character of Jesus' Kingdom.

When our faith is rooted in professing, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe", we are informed to live a specific way, to put our faith into action.

The Letter of James has the famous passage: "If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." And in the previous verse we read, "The judgment is merciless to one who has not shown mercy."

There is, of course, the question of what to do.

Is it enough to admire the Mother Teresas and Dorothy Days and get out of the way and let them do their great work and applaud them?

Is it enough to give to good causes, from a safe distance, so to speak? This is not a bad thing, of course. No one could be condemned for it.

Is it enough to volunteer in various charities?

In a sense these are the wrong questions. It is not enough to ask what is enough. The question itself lends itself to settling for the minimum, to finding the exact placement of the fine line between "I can't do everything" and "I won't do anything."

The starting point, you see, isn't the what, the external actions and good works. It's the attitude, more specifically, in our case, the Christian attitude that seeks to imitate Jesus in every way: his kindness, his respect, his welcoming way, his concern, his thirst for justice, in short, never the minimum, always generous, a kind of "magnificent obsession."

For you see, in the twilight of life we will be judged on our love for, closeness to and tenderness towards our brothers and sisters. Upon this will depend our entry into, or exclusion from, the kingdom of God: our belonging to the one side or the other. Through his victory, Jesus has opened to us his kingdom. But it is for us to enter into it, beginning with our life now, by being close in concrete ways to our brothers and sisters who ask for bread, clothing, acceptance, solidarity. If we truly love them, we will be willing to share with them what is most precious to us, Jesus himself and his Gospel.

Jesus Christ is our paradoxical king. We celebrate Christ's sovereignty, because we have opened his heart to God's charity.

