

Christus Rex

A sermon preached by the Rev. Robert Bruce Edson in St. John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts on the Sunday of the Feast of Christ the King, November 23, 2008.

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Matthew 25:40

This Feast of Christ the King, *Christus Rex*, is centered on the kingly nature of Christ. The concept of a king and a kingdom does not come easily to us as Americans. In the early days of our nation, there were those who considered having a king instead of a president as head of state. What we now know today as the White House was originally referred to as the "president's palace." The swearing of a new American president is relatively simple in contrast to the elaborate and impressive English coronation in Westminster Abbey with all its ancient pageantry. On January 20th in our Nation's Capital there will be the simple inaugural ceremony followed by a grand parade. I have been to a good many Presidential inaugural parades with colorful floats from each state and bands marching down Pennsylvania Avenue. I do live a good parade. Whether it is a coronation or an inauguration, the oath taken by the head of state reminds us that all earthly power ultimately comes from God.

While the office of the presidency has become far more imperious than was originally intended, many European constitutional monarchies today are mere figureheads, functioning symbolically in ancient tradition as ruler of the country. Jesus is no symbolic figurehead. While his kingship is not of this world, his spiritual authority is greater than any earthly power.

When one day we have to give account of ourselves, how will we measure up? What will have to say for how we responded to the needs of the world? We can't escape the fact that there are people out there who are homeless, underfed and poorly clothed. We can't ignore those who are sick who have little or no access to adequate health care. While doing good works doesn't earn us anything, essential to Christian living is helping to feed, house, clothe, heal and visit those in need. The face of Christ is in those who come to the local food pantry as well as in those who find refuge in domestic violence centers. You can see his face in those who find haven in shelters for the homeless as well as those who where meals are served in churches. What will we say? Did we respond to the concerns of others or did we ignore them? When all history is brought to conclusion, will we be able to say that we had the same compassion for others as we would have wanted for ourselves? When it comes to dividing the sheep from the goats, there will be no mixed breeds!

Saint Martin of Tours lived in the fourth century only a few years after the conversion of Constantine and at the end of the era of Christian persecution. Martin was a soldier in the Roman army when he came upon a beggar who was cold and hungry. Having no money to give him, he took his cloak and cut it in half and gave it to him to keep warm. That night, he had a dream that it was Christ himself to whom he gave that portion of his cloak. After his conversion and baptism, Martin became a soldier for Christ.

I believe that in the end we will not be judged on how many people we brought to Christ, how many scripture verses we memorized, the number of charities we supported, the good deeds we accomplished or how often we were in church. Rather, we are going to be judged on how faithful we were in witnessing to Christ's love and mercy by our compassion and standing for social justice.

Part of what we give to the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts goes to outreach programs in the area and beyond. From time to time people ask what we are getting out of it. The simple answer is that we don't expect anything in return. Our reward is the privilege giving and expecting nothing in return. True service in Christ seeks no reward because giving is its own reward. It is in giving that we receive.

Let's be very clear about the standards in God's kingdom. It matters very much the kind of person we are and the kind of life we lead. It matters how we treat others in God's realm. There is no place for abusive and manipulative behavior and playing games with peoples' minds, no place for blaming others for our own mistakes. Divisiveness in the church is not just unproductive, it is destructive. Behavior that causes dissension, division, and strife is demonic and has no place in the kingdom of God. These manipulators are the ones who are the funk in dysfunctional churches. One of the best protections against it is to recognize it and be bold in naming it. To ignore it is to deny it and we know that denial is not just a river in Egypt!

There is simply no way we can try to fool God; there is no way we can pretend to be anything other than who we really are. Being serious about taking out citizenship in God's kingdom requires wholeness and integrity. In Christ's kingly rule there is no claim for personal rights, privileges or entitlement. We must be willing to give fully of ourselves to advance the kingdom and realm of Christ. Never think that once you have accepted Christ you're in and nothing else matters. It matters a great deal how we live our lives from here on out.

I see Christ's kingship not in his sitting on a majestic throne in fine robes, but in being present with us in our personal journeys and in our everyday struggles. Rather than living in regal and splendid isolation, he walks with us, especially in times of moral ambiguity. He identifies with those in distress and empowers the poor, the displaced, the oppressed, and the outcast. When we advocate for the poor and the powerless, we are doing it for him.

George Bernard Shaw in his play, *The Devil's Disciple*, wrote that the worse sin committed against others is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them. If we take our faith seriously, we will not be indifferent to anyone nor take anything for granted. Every person is valued and every opportunity is used to witness to Christ.

I do love a good parade, but the Christian life is not sitting in the stands and watching the parade go by, it is getting out there and marching with Christ the King.