

## **34<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2006**

We are celebrating the feast of Christ the King, but what do we mean by that? How do we conceive of this kingdom? What kind of king is Christ? All today's readings try to situate us in the right picture of what the kingship of Christ is and its requirements, and how we can belong to it.

Let us start by exploring the 1<sup>st</sup> reading. To better understand this reading requires that we know the context through which it was written. In fact, in a dramatic vision in the night, Daniel sees four huge beasts coming from the sea, namely lion, bear, leopard and, then, a monster that crushes everything on its passage. These beasts symbolize, he says, the great kingdoms of the world that have successively oppressed Israel.

At the end, he sees a Son of man coming from heaven to whom is given by God all the powers and dominions over the whole world and nations of the earth. The reign of the Son of man comes at the end when all others have disappeared. His dominion and reign lasts forever; nothing can destroy it. All peoples of the earth will be submissive to him, but not oppressed; they will even reign with him.

This vision conveys a double message to us as it was for Israel. First, God has his time to make justice and to overthrow those who persecute his people. Second, whatever may happen to his beloved, he will intervene and set them free. They have to take courage and to hope for salvation.

The thing, however, is that from the historical point of view, this prophecy of Daniel was not completely fulfilled. Even if it is true that Israel got rid of foreign enemies in that time, the people went again and again through other political subjection. In fact, when a prophet speaks, it is like in a dream, as a Youngman would say, "when I am adult, I'll have a beautiful house". But how this dream will come to reality, he does not know.

In the Jewish oral interpretation of the law we call "Talmud", there is a story of a man who during a dark night lit a lamp, but the wind blew it out. He lit a second and a third time, but the wind kept blowing it out. At the end, he said that he would wait until sunrise. As Israel was repeatedly colonized through history, the sunrise meant the coming of Messiah. Hence, the longing for the messianic time where God would intervene for his people. Today in Israel some are still waiting the Messiah.

And yet, the Messiah has already come; we are awaiting his second coming, as he has promised. Jesus Christ is the Messiah. He is the beginning and the end of everything, the Alpha and the Omega of every creature that exists. He is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the rulers of the earth. He is the savior of the world. He has saved us from our sins by his blood and made us members of the kingdom of his Father and our Father, his God and our God. To him belong glory and power for all eternity.

But what is the essence and the content of Christ's kingdom we are talking about? For Jesus, his kingdom is not of this world; it does not belong to it; it has

nothing to do with worldly power, human triumph or domination. It is essentially and above all testimony and sacrifice at the service of the truth.

In fact, the temptation has always been in the history of the church to make the kingdom of God visible in this world through the search for temporal power. Down the centuries the kingdom of the Messiah has been confused with the kingdoms of this world. Think about the pontifical states to which the revolution in Italy put an end or the establishment of the Kingdom of Jesus among the Indians in Paraguay by the Jesuit fathers in the 16th century. At times the triumph of Christ has been identified with the triumphs of his representatives on earth. Thus the Church became “triumphalist”, in direct competition with the other heads of nations.

And yet, when listening to the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate in today's Gospel, we realize that his kingship is of another type. As a matter of fact, Jesus never sought to occupy the first place in his ministry and life; he never wanted to be served, on the contrary he gave an example of service to all by his words and acts. To crown all that, he washed the feet of his disciples and gave up his life on the cross. He reacted to all attempts to make him accept kingship of this world. And when people wanted to make him king, he fled to the point of disappointing the messianic expectations of his own disciples.

Such facts show that Jesus' kingdom is that of heart and fraternity, of service to all and brotherhood between peoples and nations. This is the reason why he was born and sent into the world, namely to tell all the peoples the truth that God is their Father and they are all brothers and sisters, and that they belong to his kingdom, that God loves them and wants them to be his children.

In this respect, the advance of Jesus' kingdom corresponds to other criteria than those used to judge the growth of our Republics and Kingdoms. Its growth depends on our conversion of hearts by letting the truth of the Gospel guiding our lives and actions. We belong to the kingdom of Jesus in so far as we dedicate our lives to the service of our fellow human beings, taking care of them with respect and affection as though God was acting through us.

Where people strive to transcend conflicts and to live in peace with one another, where people forgive one another, knowing that without forgiveness life is impossible, there Jesus' kingdom is at work. In other words, the number of the baptized, the effectiveness of our ecclesial structures or the beauty of our cathedrals, do not determine the kingdom of Jesus. If we do not make Jesus the king of our hearts and our lives, we do not belong to his kingdom.

Let us ask Jesus to be the king and the ruler of hearts and lives. May he conquer our thoughts and actions and teach us to love and serve him by loving and serving one another! May God bless you all!



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