

Today we celebrate The Solemnity of Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

The scene in today's Christ the King Gospel reading is about as intense as it gets. It is a vision of the Day of Judgment. Christ the King separates those who will spend eternity with him in his glorious kingdom from those who will forever be tormented with the devil and his angels.

The standard of judgment appears to be how we respond to human need. Whatever we have done, we have done so to Jesus. If we have fed the hungry, given any thirsty person a drink, visited anyone who was sick, we've all those things to Jesus. And conversely, if we've neglected to do any of those things, we have likewise neglected Jesus Himself.

Those on the King's right are astonished. "We didn't know it was you", they say. Jesus is rewarding them for what comes naturally to them. They simply helped those people who they encountered over the course of their lives who had simple needs: hunger, thirst, etc. It doesn't take all that much to give a hungry man a meal, or a thirsty man a drink. It might take a little more to visit the sick and those in prison, but these are simple things. Those who give simple, human help to those we are likely to meet in everyday life are the ones who will enter the kingdom.

Those on the King's left are perhaps not astonished so much as they are feeling gypped. "Had we known it was *you*, we might have done something." Some people are willing to help if by helping they either gain some good for themselves or avoid some pain.

The King we have in Jesus is not the King the Jewish world was expecting at the time. Jesus met none of the expectations the Jews had of their Messiah King, at least not as they read the prophets of old. Jesus did not conquer the world, he did not even conquer part of the world. Not in a military sense. He did not free the Jews from Roman oppression.

No Jew of Jesus' time could have foreseen or comprehended a King nailed to a cross. Kings sent others to the cross. They didn't go there themselves. What clearer sign of utter failure and weakness could there be? Jesus' kingship isn't visible to the naked eye. It can only be seen through the lens of faith and belief.

We get a glimpse of Jesus' kingship in his self-emptying, self-denying and self-giving nature. In the second chapter of Philippians Paul tells us that Jesus did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself to be born in human form. The paradox about Jesus' kingship is that although he laid it down, He cannot truly lose it. Just as He said that He lays down His life so that He can take it up again, so He does with His kingship, for the two are the same. His kingship belongs to His very essence.

For many, and especially to the first century Jews, the greatness of a king is readily apparent. You can see the majesty and royalty of the king because of many things: because of the wealth displayed in how and where he lives, the kind of clothing and jewelry he wears. It's apparent in the way people obey his commands and wait on him hand and foot. It's in

the way he legislates. It's in the way he commands armies to conquer other nations and peoples. It's in the lavish way he entertains his guests at dinners and parties.

Jesus does not fit that description.

In *The Republic*, Plato said that the nature of kingship is such that it will attract all the wrong types. Monarchy will attract people who seek their own glory, their own security and welfare. It will attract the prideful, the arrogant, the heartless. There's a legendary story about when King Henry VIII was on his deathbed, he instructed his servants to ring the bell in the court chapel continuously until he died. This would alert heaven of his imminent arrival, he supposed.

No bells were ringing as Christ the King hung on the cross. Heaven already knew He was coming home.

The greatness of Jesus' kingship is in how much He sacrificed and the incomprehensible gift He brings to us through His sacrifice. The gift of salvation, the gift of eternal life with Him in heaven is infinitely greater than anything we could have here on earth. Jesus came primarily to redeem this world and each of us. He came to make us new creatures in Him and to create a new place for us that's not in or of this world.

Majesty, glory, honor and regal bearing belongs to the nature of God. We have a kingly God, and a kingly savior in Jesus Christ. But the greatness of His kingship is in what he gave up, not in what He gained

from Himself. Christ is King for His incomprehensible love, mercy and self-sacrifice.

Jesus Christ is the King Eternal. All praise and honor and glory to His name. Amen.