

FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING C CYCLE NOVEMBER 20, 2016

1st Reading: 2 Samuel 5:1-3 [They anointed David king of Israel]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 122 *♪♪ Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord. ♪♪*

2nd Reading: Colossians 1:12-20 [Christ is the firstborn of all creation]

Gospel: Luke 2 [Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom]

♪ All creatures of our God and king, lift up your voice and with us sing: Alleluia, alleluia!

Oh burning sun with golden beam and silver moon with softer gleam:

O Praise ye ! O Praise ye ! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia ! ♪

That hymn is a setting of the great canticle of thanksgiving composed by St. Francis of Assisi. I sang it because next Thursday is Thanksgiving. People all over our country will gather to celebrate what we are thankful for. They will gather as families and as communities. Many will take the time to make it a day of both *thanks* and *giving*, as they reach out to feed others who are in need.

But there is also pain in this season in remembering the ones who are not physically present, and remembering what is far from perfect in our families, in our parish communities & in our country.

My sisters, my brother and I have not been able to visit our mother since 2009, when she went home to give thanks to God in person.

There are many who are out of work or struggling to make ends meet.

There are too many who are homeless & hungry in our country.

There are people fleeing from war, oppression and starvation all over the world.

Our very planet is threatened by greedy exploitation that affects the poor & powerless all over the world.

To give thanks is a *choice* that is made not only because of our real blessings, but also in spite of some parts of our personal, communal & national situations. Yet to give thanks is a healing choice. It was a choice Jesus made on the night before he died, as he was fully aware that his own nation and religion had failed him.

At that supper, he took bread, gave *thanks* and said,

"Take this and eat, take this and drink, this is my body, this is my blood."

To give thanks is a choice made by the thief who must have thanked God for the one who was next to him as he found the courage to say,

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

It is a choice made by David in the Responsorial Psalm, and by Paul in the 2nd reading.

It is a choice that can give us hope in the midst of the most difficult times, and can bring light to the darkest shadows. The most important thing we are doing here this evening is to give thanks, to sing praise to the Lord who is our light and our life.

What are you thankful for this year? How can we choose to give thanks?

I can tell you some of the things I choose to give thanks for.

I give thanks for Family - even though my mother will not be present. I will savor the moments I have with my brother, my 3 sisters and their children. I will thank God for who they are and for who I am because of their love.

I give thanks for Terry, a formerly incarcerated man

who sometimes calls me and Sr. Anna his foster father & mother.

But most of all, I am thankful for the Good News which Jesus spoke and lived. In today's Gospel, Jesus responds to violence with patience, with a willingness to die rather than to kill. Jesus goes beyond David, the ideal king of the Jews in the first reading, when he shatters the expectations of his people for a military messiah who will defeat the oppressive Romans.

Jesus responds to hypocrisy and condemnation with mercy and faith. He trusts in God, commending his spirit into God's hands. He asks his Father to forgive his killers & defeats them with love.

He is a king, as we celebrate in today's feast, but his reign tells a much different story than the kings of old, or the dictators, presidents and CEO's of the 21st century. His kingdom, his reign is not a place. It is found in any situation in which God's will is done. It is a set of relationships sometimes described as a *kin-dom*, since we are all kin with God as our loving parent. When I listen well to the Good News Jesus lived, by the grace of God I can hear Good News in *all* the stories of my life.

The reign of Christ the King is described with poetic beauty in today's Eucharistic Prayer. These are the words of the Preface, the beginning of the great prayer of thanksgiving at the heart of the Mass:

"As king, Christ claims dominion over all creatures, that he may present to you, Father, an eternal and universal kingdom, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace."

The Good News, the Gospel we see unfolding in Luke's account of the death and rising of Jesus, & the good news we hear in the poetry of Paul today is much different than the plot lines of many action movies & video games. Those are often stories which promise peace through violence and more deadly weapons. The story we call the Gospel, the one told in the scene from the life of Jesus today is the same one he tells through parables & miracles, & the same one Paul sings about in his letters.

And story is important. If the story our world tells us inspires us to chase after profit without regard to limits of resources or waste production, we will not be motivated to conserve or to consider anything but our own comfort or wealth.

And as Pope Francis has said, *"Any harm done to the environment... is harm done to humanity which particularly affects the poor."*

If our story, our framing story ignores or even justifies the growing gap between rich and poor, then we will never open our hearts to those in need, or make laws which protect the common good of the human family.

If our story divides us into a vicious cycle of tension between us and them, whoever "they" are, we will never work to find ways other than war or domination to live together in peace. If our story isolates us from the rest of the world, from people who belong to other nations, races or religions, then we have neglected to recognize Jesus in our brothers & sisters, the other members of our human family, and we have cut ourselves off from our best selves, and from our neighbors who are part of us!

How can we be a part of the kingdom of God, the kin-dom of Abba, Our Father? How can we be a part of the reign of Christ the King? How can we experience the love that forgave the thief on the cross, the grace that motivated the ones who stayed at the foot of his cross. How can we imitate the fearless lives of proclaiming justice and peace lived by Paul and Peter, Francis and Clare, Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King, Malala Yousafzai & Pope Francis?

We can enter more deeply into the Kin-dom of God by can exposing and rejecting the stories told by so much of our culture - the stories of prosperity through exploitation, power through violence, security through oppression and domination, comfort through exclusion of the other.

We can go beyond the stories of so much conventional religion: individual salvation that ignores the common good; purely spiritual salvation that neglects our stewardship of the earth; a condemning attitude that rejects the very people Jesus reached out to.

We can enter into his story by standing with the crowd & gazing on how he responded to violence with real but non-violent resistance. We can enter his story by looking at how he answered condemnation with the offer of forgiveness . We can enter the story of Jesus by meaning what we say when we pray, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We can enter his story by trusting his love and risking lives of faith, hope, justice, love and peace.

We know a man who has entered into the story of Jesus. He is suffering from terminal cancer, but he recently spoke in a group that gathers every month to share faith & prayer in words that made us laugh, and then took our breath away.

First he said, "I am hearing God call me to meet new people. But do all of them have to be doctors?" Then he gave thanks to God for "*being in this group & recognizing that everyone of you is a part of me, and I am a part of you.*"

We can enter his reign by imitating the good thief and praying the words before communion with thankful hearts, "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul [and my body and my whole self] shall be healed," Let us sing with the one who entered paradise with Jesus on the day he was crucified:

♪ Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. ♪