

## Ordinary 34 – Christ the King 11.24.24

There wasn't a lot of green space in the neighborhood where I grew up. But behind that neighborhood of rowhomes, there was a little hill. The kids in our neighborhood played a game there called "King of the Hill". On the count of three, everyone would race to the top of that hill. The one who reached the top first was the king. His job was to protect his turf. He pushed and shoved the other kids down the hill in order to retain his position and supposed power. Of course, it was only a matter of time before the king grew tired, losing his lofty position and was thrown down the hill by the new victor and king.

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King. When we think of kings and kingdoms we think of power, authority, and massive wealth. Sometimes kings are benevolent. Others are self-serving, autocratic, tyrannical, or abusive.

For those of us who live in a republic, even our leaders can sometimes take on the attributes of a self-absorbed king. Also, we sometimes cede our power and will to that person in the hope that they will save us from the ills we see or perceive to see around us. Some years ago, I was part of a group that met with an elected official in Pinellas County. When we approached him about doing something related to the issue of affordable housing for the needy in our county, he launched into a condescending lecture about how a republic works. He explained that the people elect someone to represent them. And then that person does what he thinks is best for the community. There's no reason, this official explained, that he has to bend his will to what the majority in a community wants. As you might imagine that person was not re-elected to a second term.

In the days of Jesus, the people and most of the Apostles imagined what Jesus the Messiah, the King, would do. They were sure he would be a type of military figure, leading an army and the people in deposing the oppressive heads of government in Israel and driving out the Roman occupiers of that land. Then, Jesus the King would start his own government, appoint those faithful disciples to his cabinet, and lead that group to prosperity and blissful happiness for the rest of their lives.

As we know, that's not how things turned out. Today's gospel certainly confirms that outcome. In the passage we just heard, Jesus has been arrested. He stands before Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Pilate is intrigued by Jesus' claim of being a king, but it seems apparent that he is not threatened by Jesus. This whole situation seems more a nuisance to him than anything else. He caves into the will of the religious elite and hands Jesus over for crucifixion. Through it all, Jesus remains steadfast. He speaks directly about his mission and accepts his fate. Jesus knows that in doing so, he will liberate believers from the bondage of their sin. Furthermore, he knows he is ushering in his Kingdom, which begins on earth and continues for eternity. His Kingdom isn't about prosperity, power, or domination. Rather, his Kingdom is about mercy, justice, and inner peace. The path to that Kingdom is discovered by living as Jesus did – serving those in need, working for justice for the oppressed, forgiving those who sin against us, and praying for our persecutors, to name a few of the stepping stones to that Kingdom.

That description of the Kingdom of God and the way to get there sounds a lot like the game of King of the Hill we played as children. Climbing the hill to God's Kingdom seems difficult and even exhausting. But the difference between that childhood game and Jesus' call to ascend the mountain to his Kingdom is that his Kingdom is life-giving, even invigorating. We find life when we serve others; when we take up our cross like Christ; when we live lives of mercy and justice.

All of us have an image of the earthly kingdom we'd like to live in. Perhaps it is a place where life is easy; includes riches that we don't have to work too hard for; and is accompanied by a heaping dose of authority where we can tell others what to do and don't have to obey anyone else's directives. Again, that is not the Kingdom that Jesus established and calls us to.

Today we ask, what kingdom do we seek? Who is our king? If we search for and appoint someone we think will fix everything that's wrong in our world and in our lives, then we are setting ourselves up for bitter disappointment. If we search for a kingdom that we think will provide riches and security all our

days, then our search will probably be endless. We will also quickly realize that our wealth, our health, our power, and our security will surely slip away at some point and time.

There is an old expression that says be careful what you wish for. If you seek a certain king or look for possessions in that kingdom which you think will bring contentment, then you will never be satisfied. But if you seek Christ, THE King, you will know peace, strength, and wisdom that never dies. You will inherit a place in THE Kingdom that lasts for all eternity.

While I may want to be King of the Hill for a time on this earth, I continually attempt to make Christ my King – by loving like he did, forgiving as he did from the cross, and being an instrument of mercy and justice as he was. This earthly kingdom will pass away for sure. But living on this earth like Christ, imitating him in all things, is the path to the Kingdom of God and living with Christ forever.

Amen? Amen!