

FIRST READING: Daniel 7:13-14

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Daniel:\

As the visions during the night continued, I saw one like a Son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; when he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, the one like a Son of man received dominion, glory, and kingship; all peoples, nations, and languages serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 93:1, 1-2, 5

The LORD is king; he is robed in majesty.

The LORD is king, in splendor robed; robed is the LORD and girt about with strength.

The LORD is king; he is robed in majesty.

And he has made the world firm, not to be moved. Your throne stands firm from of old; from everlasting you are, O Lord.

The LORD is king; he is robed in majesty.

Your decrees are worthy of trust indeed; holiness befits your house, O Lord, for length of days.

The LORD is king; he is robed in majesty.

SECOND READING: Revelation 1:5-8

A reading from the Book of Revelation:

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, who has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming amid the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. All the peoples of the earth will lament him. Yes. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, " says the Lord God, "the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty."

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: John 18:33b-37

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Pilate said to Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my

kingdom is not here." So Pilate said to him, "Then you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the Feast of Christ the King, the Last Sunday of Year B

We Americans of the United States, have a problem with monarchies. Our history as a republic began with a revolt against Great Britain during the reign of George III. George Washington refused to be crowned a king and chose to be elected a president instead. Fascinated as we may be with the British monarchy and trappings, the notion of the divine right to rule does not fit into our democratic principals. Yet, our Catholic clergy, including me, received the Sacrament of Holy orders and hold our offices by nature of our ordinations or, in other words, by divine right.

We have a western notion of what a king is and it is filled with images of pomp, prestige and power. There is a more ancient and Middle Eastern history and tradition to this feast. The ancient Hebrew people held a different notion to their leadership. God was their creator. God entered an intimate relationship with the Hebrew tribes. They had no God but God. God created them, united them, freed and saved them. God led them to faith and the Promised Land from their slavery in Egypt. God was their true leader and king. Moses was the means through whom God worked wonders, for God works through God's people.

It is in the person of Moses that inspired the Jewish conception of King. Moses was not just a political leader. God chose this man for his life's journey and mission. God called Moses from the burning bush, gave him his mission that lasted beyond his lifetime and taught Moses God's name; YHWH or I Am Who Am. God anointed him priest to offer sacrifice for sin, his own and the sins of the nation. God anointed him prophet to hear, heed and preach God's word. God anointed him king to lead God's people from slavery to faith and freedom as God's holy people. The threefold task had a name; Messiah.

Messiah means the Anointed One in English, Christos meaning the Anointed One in Greek and translated Rex, meaning king, in Latin. Therein lies our problem of concept. Latin had no direct word for the Hebrew. Rex, king, is only one aspect of the mission of Moses. When we say Christ the King, what do we actually mean? Since Christ means the Anointed One, we commemorate Jesus' mission on this feast. But King? Perhaps a better wording of the feast would be the feast of Jesus, the Anointed Messiah. Once again the meaning comes from the context.

Jesus mission was to be rejected, suffer, die on the cross as a willing sacrifice for our sins and to return. His death, once and for all has saved us. Through the cross, we can approach God, through Jesus, for God's forgiveness of our sins. All we need to be saved is faith in God and in the one God sent, Jesus his son our Messiah. Jesus rose from the dead to give us, through faith, the promise of eternal life and union with God. Jesus promised to remain with us, always, until the end of the age. Jesus returned to the Father and sent the Spirit to lead, guide and teach us all we need until Jesus returns. Jesus will return to complete his mission and establish the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is the sign of God's final triumph over sin and death.

Jesus, in his final message to the disciples and us during the last supper, promised that we will be one as the Father, Son and Spirit are one. We catch glimpses of the power of this promise when we gather with our families over the coming holidays in celebration. We glimpse it, too, each time we gather for mass. When we know Jesus in the breaking of the bread, Jesus becomes one with us. We eat the Eucharist which is Jesus' body and blood thus becoming part of our bodies. These simple actions God uses to reveal the mysteries of God's promise; oneness, eternal life and the kingdom.

All we need is faith and faith is a gift from God that we do not make, earn or deserve. We receive faith as we receive God's gifts of life, love, family, community and eternal life in God's way and in God's time. Everything and everyone depend completely on God. Though we all experience life, in a practical way, that it feels like it all depends upon us and our actions. We live by faith and not our feelings.

Before the bishops decided to change the prayers of the mass, we could pray the Mystery of Faith in this way: "Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again." The first and the last, alpha and omega have their roots in the ancient Hebrew name for God, YHWH or I Am Who Am. Past and future unite in the eternal now. Jesus mission through his death saved us two thousand years ago. Jesus mission to save us unfolds now in our lives. Jesus mission will be fulfilled when Jesus returns. As we are united with one another in Jesus now, our unity will be complete in the Kingdom of God, forever. The last Sunday of the liturgical year, the Feast of Christ the King, is not so much a celebration of kingship but a celebration of the Kingdom as Jesus returns to complete his mission to save us.

The passages we read from the Old Testament are not Christian writings. They are Jewish writings. They have their own separate meaning and interpretations for Jews. We find meaning in them too; as Christians. When I approach them, I try to understand their original, Jewish message. We hear Daniel's message as a prophesy of Jesus' second coming presaged in the Jewish scriptures. Was this the original meaning? Definitely not. Who is a son of man? Well, as my father's son, I am. Note the article the passage uses: "a" not "the." This is critical. Jesus referred to himself as The Son of Man. He used the definite not an indefinite article. The term reflects humanity, someone like us.

In someone like us, God will restore what is lost. What was lost? Jerusalem, the temple, the nation and the Davidic kingship. From Daniel's point of view, those things God would restore. According to Jewish tradition, the king was a figurehead for God's rule. God was Israel's true king. No real king could be greater than God. God is as everlasting as God's dominion. God is beyond this world. This fantastic vision reflects God's transcendent nature, that this world cannot know. Since Jerusalem and the temple have been destroyed they no longer symbolize God's realm. Daniel used other imagery to convey God's realm.

Earlier, in chapter seven of Daniel, four beasts represented the pagan nations and peoples. The number four also represented the four cardinal directions. A human person represented God's people. A son of man represents God's faithful wherever they may be. Each Jewish person could be seen as a son of man. The message of Daniel was for the nation in Diaspora and each individual person. To bring these themes into our Christian interpretation makes some sense;

for the message of scripture, in general, is for we who read it. We are all human; sons and daughters of a man and woman.

Who's the Ancient One? For readers of Marvel Comic's Doctor Strange, hold off for a moment. Can it be God? Or more? What can be more than God? The notion of eternal life was different from ours. For Jews then and still some now, eternal life was living through one's descendants not living forever with God and the saints in heaven. The ancient one also included the notion of the covenant with Abraham and later further defined with Moses and God's law. By this time the covenant was of old. The bonds of the covenant were still intact despite the destruction of king, nation, temple and city. Even dispersed throughout the world the people were still God's people. Judaism is still an active, living and growing religion. Jews are people of faith who remain God's chosen who, both God and God's people, have existed together for millennia.

A son of man is someone like us. Jesus is someone like us in all but sin. As Messiah, Jesus is priest, prophet and king. Jesus is son of God and son of Mary; fully God and a full human being. He has two complete natures. God became a human being through the mystery of the Incarnation; the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus was God's Anointed as part of God's plan of salvation. Yet, all four of the gospels have Jesus being anointed with perfumed oil at a dinner party by a woman who knelt at his feet. Jesus' physical anointing was performed by a sinner. She would benefit from Jesus' dying on the cross. Her faith saved her.

At baptism, each person is anointed by a perfumed oil called chrism. Chrism and Christ have the same Greek root word. Chrism is the oil that anoints the Anointed One, Messiah or Christ. With it, each baptized person shares in the mission and ministry of Jesus being anointed priest, prophet and king. Each of us is an anointed one, a Messiah and Christ in Christ. My priestly life stems directly from my baptism. I could not have received the sacrament of Holy Orders without it. My priesthood is based on the priesthood of the baptized; not the other way 'round. Together we build the Church which is Jesus' mystical body on earth.

We read Daniel differently. Jesus referred to himself as "The" Son of Man. That's what we hear Daniel predict. Jesus is the one who will bring God's realm to us. In Jesus is the promise of God's fulfillment. God sent Jesus, his Son and Eternal Word to save us. Jesus died and rose as part of his salvific mission. Yet, though Jesus saved us once and for all through the Paschal Mystery, the mystery still unfolds in our lives and through us. We still sin and seek forgiveness from God; in this we know God's salvation personally.

Most of us think that the promise Jesus made to us is eternal life. It is and more; it is eternal life in God's Kingdom as resurrected, body and soul, like Jesus. When Jesus returns as Christ at the end of the age, the dead will rise and the Kingdom will become an eternal reality. It is then that Jesus mission will be complete and we will be one with God and each other in eternal life, body and soul. This is the message of Revelation. God always wins in the end times.

The gospel of John is big on dialog. The other three are bigger on narrative and Jesus' discourses. There's an interesting feature. When someone, like Pilate, asked Jesus a direct question, he seemed to be evasive. As Pilate interrogated Jesus, who seemed to be in control? "Are you king of the Jews?" Jesus changed the subject. "What have you done?" Here Jesus answered Pilate's first question. Who is someone with a kingdom and attendants? A king!

“Then you are a king!” Jesus shifted subject again and answered Pilate’s second question. Jesus spoke of his mission, work and testimony. Jesus also answered Pilate’s next question before he asked it. “What is truth?” Jesus, as God’s Word is true. We who have listened to Jesus have heard the truth. It is Jesus himself. “I am the way, the truth and the life.” We believe in Jesus and have a share in it.

God loved the cosmos into existence. God spoke the Word. God’s Word has saved us in love. In Jesus, we have known the Father. Through the Spirit we live, believe and love. Through us and our witness, God works. God’s mission of salvation will be fulfilled when Christ returns as the Messiah and the Son of Man.

May the love of God sustain us and lead us to the Kingdom.

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