

34th. Sunday in O.T. 2020 - Feast of Christ the King.

On that first Good Friday, when Pilate asked Jesus, “*Are you a king then?*” Jesus answered, “*Yes, I am a king.*” However, to identify Our Lord’s kingship, with the usual understanding of that royal title, is to miss the point. On an earlier occasion Jesus said, “*I have come to serve not to be served*”, and he referred to himself as the “*Good Shepherd*”. In celebrating this Feast of the Shepherd King there are three questions we ought to reflect on: “What do we see?” “What do we feel?” “What do we do?”

When we look at Jesus Christ the King what do we see? For a crown we see but the thorns; for a throne there is the Cross; for royal insignia, the nails; for a regal robe nothing other than his own blood. Pontius Pilate sneered, “*Behold your king!*” (*Jn.19:14*) Yet, if we only see a broken body nailed to the Cross, we have failed to see the extraordinary nature of Christ's kingship. Christ's suffering on the Cross was not an end in itself. He did not suffer because suffering has a value, but because love without limitation involves suffering. We are saved, not by the physical suffering and death of Jesus, but by his absolute, self-giving love which did not count death too high a price to pay. The regal nobility that shines out from the crucified Jesus is the wonder of his infinite love. What do we see? We see something astounding: Jesus Christ, King - the King of Love! Even the pagan soldier who had supervised the crucifixion of Jesus was moved to proclaim, “*In truth this man was the Son of God!*” (*Mk.15:39*)

What do we feel? What do we feel standing before our crucified King? While Jesus seeks, by his love, to move the human heart, he waits for our personal decision. Modern culture, in the search for joy and happiness turns in on itself; it becomes preoccupied with its own interests and comforts, and even its own sorrows. Pope Francis claims that much of modern society is self-referential, compelled to constantly entertain itself, buy more stuff, and have more fun. In the hectic search for happiness the quiet joy of the Lord's love is overlooked. (*cf EG 2*)

That great Jewish thinker, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who died recently, speaks of “that habit of the heart that listens to the music beneath the noise” (17/9/20) – do we hear the music of Jesus’ love that lies beneath the noise of our passions, and the din of modern society? He looks at us and yearns to shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence, and to awaken us to a new way of living. Will we permit his love to touch our hearts and move them to believe in his love?? If, standing before the Crucified One, we feel his love then our hearts will be conquered by love. (cf DCE 33).

What then are conquered hearts moved to do? That is our third question. Pope Francis says love speaks of the beloved, points him out, makes him known? (cf EG 265) Those, whose hearts are conquered by the Lord's love, follow the example of Our Lord. Jesus' whole life, his actions, his care and concern for people, his complete giving of himself, is our model. He is the Shepherd King, and his motivation is love for his flock; this “Good Shepherd” looks after his flock, “*bringing back the stray, bandaging the wounded and making the weak strong...watching over the fat and healthy.*” To do what the Lord does means that we too are to be shepherds in his image.

This Sunday’s Gospel passage outlines what good shepherds do: they feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, visit the sick and those in prison. They do this, not just because that is what good Christians are supposed to do, but because they live the Gospel on a higher plane. (cf EG 10) Hearts, moved by Christ's love, conquered by love, have awakened within them a love of neighbour. (cf DCE 33) The poverty in our society is often material, but sadly, poverty frequently takes other forms. There is poverty due to lack of affection and the poverty deriving from loneliness. Think, for example, of a life so focused on work that there is no room for family time, where a spouse or child is left feeling unloved; an elderly relative living alone and feeling forgotten. These are real is poverties!

Those who gaze, with faith and trust, on the crucified Christ, see something awesome, for they see the most majestic power on earth; they see infinite love, forgiveness, and mercy!

*“O king of the Friday
Whose limbs were stretched out on the Cross,
O Lord who did suffer
The bruises, the wounds, the loss,
We stretch ourselves
Beneath the shield of thy might,
Some fruit from the tree of thy passion
Fall on us this night.” Amen.*