

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
The Solemnity of Christ the King, Nov. 24-25, 2018, Cycle B

For peasants in biblical times, the notion of a benevolent kindly king who has the good of the people at heart, and who would hear their cries for justice, and act on those cries, held much attraction. Remember the story when Jesus fed a few thousand people with only about 5 loaves of bread and a couple of fish. The people were so amazed at Jesus' feat – that they wished to carry him off and proclaim him King. But, Jesus, somehow managed to escape from those people, and he kept out of public view, until the people cooled down.

When one's life is a constant struggle for survival as life is for the majority of people – even in our modern day world – believing in a powerful King, Queen or leader – of some kind who could, with a pen stroke or a wave of the hand make everything go well for the struggling masses – fuels hope and gives us a reason to keep plodding on. Still today some Christians are tempted to think of Jesus in such a worldly way of power – who will solve all of our political and economic woes – thus relieving us of the burden of carrying the cross of human existence ourselves, and working out our own solutions to our problems, guided by Jesus' values.

The Jesus, in John's gospel, reveals that He is no such worldly King, and sometimes we have a hard time really hearing him. Pilate asks Jesus: "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus is quick to point out to Pilate – you misunderstand in the worst sort of way! "My Kingdom does not belong to this world." And Pilate comes back: so, "then you are a king." But, Jesus will not give Pilate the satisfaction of calling him a king. – Jesus knows that Pilate is thinking of a king like Caesar, with military power and conquering forces. Jesus tells Pilate that is your language not mine: "You say I am a King." Instead, Jesus speaks of his mission as one who testifies to the truth. Instead of force, Jesus taught peace; instead of military might Jesus stressed the strength of sacrificial love.

It is interesting to note that every time Pilate tries to focus personally on Jesus being a king – Jesus deflects the discussion away from himself and speaks about his mission and the Kingdom – the reign of God. In contrast to Caesar, to Pilate and to ways of the world, in contrast to leaders who say I thank God for myself. Jesus is not selfishly centered on himself – rather, He is centered on God and others. The heart of Jesus' value system revolves around making our relationship with God and others the focal point of our lives. "I come to testify to the truth," Jesus says. The truth is that God is Love. In God's Kingdom Jesus calls his followers friends, not subjects, where he invites His friends into a community of beloved disciples – a community of Love where the world as we know it is turned upside down – where the leaders are the first to wash the feet of those least regarded.

The German Lutheran Theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg once observed "our present world with its wars, injustices, and brutalities, demonstrates the gap between our world and the Kingdom of Christ. God's Kingdom in Jesus has not yet come in all its fullness." True enough!

However, the more we try to incorporate ourselves in that reign of God that Jesus came to establish, then maybe, just maybe, we through Jesus, will begin to find just solutions to our constant struggles of life – our constant political, economic and social woes that seem so over whelming.

For, paradoxically, to follow the savior whose "Kingdom does not belong to this world" is to engage the world deeply and lovingly – not to run away! After the mountain top experience of the transfiguration, Jesus takes Peter, James and John back down that mountain, and into the cross of engaging the world. There is no Easter glory without going through the Jerusalem of this world first. As Saint Pope John Paul II said, we followers of Jesus are to be a "beacon and sign of salvation" building "a more just, more fraternal world, one with more solidarity, inspired by the evangelic values of hope and of future happiness to which we are called." When the Lord Jesus comes in glory, our work for the Kingdom will be brought to full fruition.