

Solemnity of Christ the King

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St. Margaret Parish, Bel Air

For us Americans, the title *King* as applied to Jesus may seem very foreign and outdated. We may well associate this title with historical figures like King Henry VIII of England. History shows him as a self-indulgent and unprincipled ruler. Or we might associate the title with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. He comes across as a ruler who accrues great wealth for himself but not advancing his country proportionately. With these negative associations, we might well ask: why do we have the title *Christ the King* in our Catholic tradition? The answer lies in history. When the title was initiated, it seemed like the best available word for capturing the truth of who Jesus is. If we look at today's Scripture passages, we find a valuable lesson in the identity of Jesus and what the title *King* is meant to convey.

It is Saint Paul in our second reading who gives us some powerful insights.

First, Paul says that Jesus is "*the image of the invisible God.*" "*In him all the fullness was pleased to dwell.*" In other words, Jesus is not like the image of a politician that a public relations firm would produce. Instead, Jesus is the very face and presence of God among us. If we want to know who God is and what God is like, all we have to do is look at Jesus. In him, the fullness of God comes to us.

And then, Paul says: "*Through him all things were made.*" "*In him all things were created.*" The idea is that Jesus is with the Father from the very beginning. And like the Father, the Son is, always was, and always will be. And so, the Father with the Son brings everyone and everything into being. The Son shares in the very act of creation.

Because of this, Paul says: "*In him all things hold together.*" And in beyond that, "*Jesus has also made peace through the blood of his cross for all people.*" In other words, Jesus with the Father is the very ground of our being. Without him, we would not be, and with him, we are. And beyond this, Jesus reconciles us or brings us to peace with God. If we paraphrase the words at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, we can say that through him and with him and in him we find our fullness of life, our salvation.

They are Paul's powerful insights into who Jesus is. They are the reasons why our Catholic tradition chose the title *King* to describe Jesus' identity. Today's gospel goes on to give us some insights into how Jesus as King relates to us.

We see first that Jesus does not rule from a throne but hangs on a cross. This conveys that Jesus does not selfishly take life from us like some of the notorious kings of history. Instead, he gives his life for us on the cross. And he gives God's life to us.

Then, we see that Jesus is not vengeful or hardened towards others. Instead, he remains compassionate and forgiving. To the one repentant thief who is crucified with him, he responds: "*Today you will be with me in paradise.*" For those who actually are crucifying him, he prays: "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

And finally, in all of this we see that Jesus is not excluding. He does not shun or push away or refuse to have anything to do with those who are imperfect. Instead, Jesus remains welcoming and including. This is his consistent way of drawing others to God and we see this all throughout the gospels.

So, our Scripture readings today open up who Jesus is and how he relates to us. The conclusions for our understanding of ourselves and of our behavior as individuals and as an institutional Church are probably obvious. Jesus, Christ our King is our model and examples in all things.