

**THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST    The Feast of Christ the King    Propers 29B  
21 November 2021**

A Homily reached by the Reverend Roger B. White in St Mark's Church, Bridgewater, Connecticut

*Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14; Psalm 93; Revelation 1.4b-8; John 18.33-38*

On next Sunday morning, we begin a new Liturgical Year: it will be the first Sunday of Advent, when we begin once more to hear the prophecies announcing the advent of Messiah; we will once more meet the 'last of the prophets', John the Baptist; we will hear the stories of Jesus' birth, of his ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing; and of his Passion, death, and Resurrection. And then we will return to stories of his ministry until we begin a new Liturgical Year next November.

This last Sunday of the old year we have come to call the Feast of Christ the King. Fifty years ago, the Roman Catholic Church began to celebrate this feast—when we look into the kingdom that is coming, when God reigns peacefully in all human hearts—as a way of concluding a year of learning what this reign must and will be. And almost at once, the Congregationalists, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and the Episcopalians decided that the Romans had had a good idea, and so we, too, began to observe the Feast of Christ the King on the Sunday before Advent I. And since all of us have now come to use pretty much the same schedule of weekly readings—the Revised Common Lectionary—we all hear the same readings today that are about an approaching kingdom and about kingship.

Therefore, we have prayed that 'the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be brought together under [Jesus'] gracious rule'. The prophet Daniel envisions God presenting 'all peoples, nations, and languages' to serve the Christ in 'an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away'. The Psalmist sings that the LORD, the King, 'has put on splendid apparel and girded himself with strength', 'mightier than the breakers of the sea', and inhabits a kingdom of 'holiness'. The Seer in the Book of Revelation describes the arrival with clouds of the one 'who loves us and freed us from our [mistakes] ... and made us to be a kingdom of priests' in service to our Creator.

And the Gospel readings appointed for today always have to do with moments of judgment. Last year, we heard Jesus describe the coming of the Kingdom in a parable about a king dividing his subjects into two groups as a shepherd divides the desirable sheep from the less desirable goats. The goats ask why they are being sent away and the king tells them that when they did not minister to the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the stranger, and the imprisoned they had not recognized him in these his beloved subjects.

Next year, we will hear Jesus on the cross not only praying for forgiveness for those crucifying him but also assuring one of the thieves next to him (the one who asks to be remembered when Jesus' comes into his kingdom) that he will indeed have a place there. This is the thief who acknowledges his mistakes, who realises who Jesus is, and who acknowledges that Jesus is innocent of the charges that have brought him to Crucifixion.

This year, however, we hear the story of Jesus' interview with Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor whom the Temple leadership (and the mob they have gathered) are trying to force to crucify Jesus. Pilate is trying to figure out if Jesus thinks that he is a king, which would make him a rebel against Caesar, and Jesus replies that his kingdom is not of this world and that he is in this world to testify to the truth that another world is coming. Pilate does not understand or acknowledge who Jesus is, and dismisses him as just another troublesome and dispensable Jew.

Our Gospel reading today, like the other Gospels appointed for the Feast of Christ the King, are about moments of judgement –on the goats; on the two thieves alongside Jesus; on the Temple leadership, their mob, and on Pilate. For Judgement will be part of the arrival of the Kingdom that replaces the kingdoms that we currently inhabit, the Kingdom that will come when God's will shall be done everywhere. And the visions in the Book of Daniel, in the Psalms, and in the Book of Revelation –thrones and clouds and fiery flames, throngs of angelic attendants, splendid apparel, courts of judgment—are stirring and filled with awesome hope for a changed world, even as the Gospel readings hold out hope that Justice will finally be done for each of us, even as just deserts will be awarded. The Feast of Christ the King is a glorious feast, and also an intimidating one. It is awesome and it is nervous-making.

And for more than 400 years before we Episcopalians began to celebrate the Feast of Christ the King on this last Sunday before Advent, we always heard on this Sunday another Gospel entirely. At the end of the old year, from 1549 onwards, we always heard about the Feeding of the Five Thousand. Jesus is given two small fish and five barley loaves (not the finest of breads), gives thanks for them, and then astonishingly shares this modest and meagre fare amongst a huge multitude.

I do appreciate the majestic glory and the solemn warnings in which the Feast of Christ the King enfolds us, and I love the hymns. And as I prepare to begin another year of trying to live the Faith and awaiting the longed-for Kingdom that no one can anticipate, I still find a message in that other Gospel that is encouraging and most helpful: give thanks for whatever you have, and share it in memory of Jesus' example. You never know what can happen, and I am not sure how better to get ready. Amen.