

21 November 2021—Christ the King: Revelation 1:4b-8 (Proper 29)

Today is the Feast of Christ the King. Yes, Jesus is King, but it is not kingship built on power or fear.

The nature of Christ's Kingship is seen in the extravagant claim in the opening verses of The Revelation to John: *Jesus...loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.* This verse sets the stage for the primary image of Jesus in the Revelation as the Lamb who was slain. The Greek term John uses for 'lamb' is unique, placing special emphasis on the Lamb's vulnerability and smallness. The Messiah was envisioned by most Jews as the Lion of Judah, who would destroy Israel's enemies in battle. In Chapter 5 of Revelation this expectation of an all-powerful conqueror is explicitly replaced with the image of a Lamb *standing as if it had been slaughtered* (v 6). The Messiah is not a superhero but One seemingly defenseless in the face of evil.

Despite apparent weakness, the Lamb ransoms His followers, who are freed to establish a new community, where God alone is worshiped, and all believers join in the saving work of the Lamb. All this because Jesus *loves us*. As St. Paul writes in Romans: *When we were unable to help ourselves, at the moment of our need, Christ died for us...Christ died for us while we were still sinners.*" (Roman 8:6,8)

Christ is King not through coercive, irresistible power but because he offers Himself for the sake of others. The purpose of Jesus' bountiful self-offering as King can be lost amid our secular ideas of political dominance.

The affect of Jesus' sacrificial Kingship on those who believe in Him are two-fold. We turn again to the reading from The Revelation. Jesus the 'Lamb-King' *freed us from our sins by his blood* (1:5c). Significantly, the verb is not 'forgive,' but 'freed'. Through faith in Jesus our sins no longer bind us, our disobedience cancelled through Jesus' gracious self-offering.

However, Jesus does not stop there. The Revelation teaches us, (Jesus) *loves us...and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father.* (1:5c, 6a). Jesus does something for us and to us. We are freed from sin and made priests; that is, just as Jesus came for others and not himself, so we are united to Christ in Baptism through which the Holy Spirit calls and empowers us to participate in Christ's priesthood in our own environments, living lives of sacrifice and service so that others may believe, may join us as fellow priests. Through Baptism we are all made oblationary intercessors; that is, we offer ourselves on behalf of those who cannot or will not stand themselves before God. This is part of our primary vocation as Christians, explicitly stated in the Prayer Book rites of Baptism and Eucharist.

We welcome the newly baptized with these words: "We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faithful of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood" (page 308). In the Eucharistic prayer, after asking God the Holy Spirit to consecrate the bread and wine to be "the holy food and drink of new and unending life in (Christ)," we pray: "Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace..." (page 363). In the world its everyone for her/himself; in the Church its everyone for someone else. We pray to God for those who cannot or will not; we bring before God those who cannot or will not come; we offer ourselves to God on behalf of those who will not or cannot. We intercede for all in trouble, need or necessity; for the sick and suffering; for the poor and homeless, the naked and marginalized, the disposable and forgotten; for sinners, for the whole world. Remember this when you come to worship, and especially on those Sundays you are tempted to skip worship. You are to come, not just for yourself; spiritually bring with you someone you know who cannot or will not come. Stand, kneel, and sit; sing, listen, and pray for them and on their behalf. Offering yourself to God in their place. This is Christ's work: His mission is our mission, so that freed from sin everyone, anyone will join us; more intercessors to serve the world in Christ's Name, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, for ever and ever. Amen.