

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. It is a time which also marks the end of the liturgical year as we anticipate and prepare for the Season of Advent. This time provides us the opportunity to reflect upon and contemplate who Jesus Christ is to us and how we view his true kingship. As we seek to emulate his kingship in our own lives, today's readings offer us a perfect context and perspective on Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

In the first reading, the prophet Samuel, who anointed David King, establishes the kingship of David over the tribes of Israel. We know that the rule of King David was the most significant in Jewish history; in a real sense, his rule is the zenith or "Golden Age" of Old Testament Judaism. As significant as his kingship might have been, it is a precursor to the kingship of Jesus Christ, the ultimate manifestation of the covenant forged by God to the people of Israel. The late Sulpician Father Raymond Brown, perhaps the preeminent biblical scholar of the twentieth century, wrote: "The story of David brings out all the strengths and weaknesses of the beginnings of the religious institution of the kingdom for the people of God... The kingship established by David... is the closest Old Testament parallel to the New Testament church... To help Christians make up their mind on how the Bible speaks [to Church issues] it would help if they knew about David and his kingdom, which was also God's kingdom and whose kings, with all their imperfections, God promised to treat as 'sons.'"

It is important to take some time to consider the life of King David. He was a man of many gifts and talents but also deeply flawed. During my annual retreat last April, I read a compelling and riveting consideration of the life of David. *David: The Divided Heart* by David Wolpe, offers a powerful portrait of a man anointed by God to lead the people of Israel. His kingship was magnificent and triumphant in many ways: he united the Jewish people for a time. He was also deeply flawed with those human characteristics which sometimes debase our human dignity. Wolpe wrote: "After God's own heart: David in character is like God in action. The inexplicable amalgam of good and evil is filtered through human hearts that embrace the totality of God's world, not timid like Saul but daring, volatile, dangerous, and epic like David. Isaiah says that God 'makes peace and creates evil.' (Is. 45:70). In other words, all things have their source in God. David stands like Lear on the heath, an epitome of earthly experience, raging, beset, the one who feels most deeply, the one who has God's heart. Perhaps David is the forerunner of the Messiah because this is the man who enacts what God wishes—in his sinfulness and sublimity, he is the most human of us all."

Both St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians and Luke's Gospel reflect the redemptive quality of Christ's kingship... a kingship premised upon supreme obedience to His Father; a kingship of the Good Shepherd who gathers together his flock; a kingship to "reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven."

As Jesus surrenders himself utterly and completely upon the cross, he is jeered and mocked by the rulers and the passersby. If he is indeed the Son of God, he can save himself and others. Through their very human lens, they see in Jesus weakness and perhaps cowardice. What rational human being would subject himself to such cruelty and suffering? Yet, it is on the cross where the kingship of Jesus Christ shines most bright. In his obedience, poverty, and sacrifice, Jesus exalts our human condition. We see this so evidently in the exchange between the two criminals flanking Jesus on the cross. One mocks him; the other takes ownership of his own missteps and seeks to be reconciled. In his own humility, he asks Jesus to remember him when Jesus enters his heavenly kingdom. Seeing his desire and heartfelt repentance, Jesus assures him that "today, you will be with me in Paradise."

The painting on the cover of this week's bulletin was taken in the Basilica della Santissima Annunziata (Most Holy Annunciation) in Florence, Italy. It is not a depiction most often seen of Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. Most depictions portray Jesus Christ in regal splendor. The photo used to depict this solemnity parallels today's Gospel from Luke but also invites us to enter more deeply into communion with the mystery of God's love for us.

Fr. Tom