

Feast of Christ the King

Cycle B, 11.21.21

Daniel 7:13-14/Revelation 1:5-8/

John 18:33-37

ALL THROUGH LOVE...

NOTHING THROUGH FEAR

At this point, it has become a cliché to say we live in a "post-truth" era. We don't have to dig deep to find the headlines that affirm this grim reality. Whether we're talking about politics, climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, or critical race theory, a quick Google search will yield zingers like, "The Death of Truth," "The Assault on Truth," "Notes on Falsehood," and "Our Post-Truth World." We are steeped in a culture of blatant lies, sly exaggerations, doctored images, wild conspiracy theories, and fake news. Objective facts, for all intents and purposes, no longer exist or matter. The true is false, the false is true, and anything can mean anything. For many of us we can't even hold a conversation with someone whose truth is so different than your own.



A man once told me about a friend of his who wanted to break off their close friendship of many years. They had been talking about one of the two topics that you may not want to touch on at your Thanksgiving dinner – religion and politics. It seems the man's political opinions over some hot button issue at the time didn't sit

well with his friend who sent him an email saying 'that they were at such different ends of the political spectrum that he felt they should part company.' Dismayed at the thought of losing his friend, the man called him and said: *"Fine, we can break off our friendship if you want, but not by an email. I'll meet you at Starbucks and we can do it in person over a cup of coffee."* It's possible to do violence to someone without ever physically striking him. Email communication often becomes an avoidance of true dialogue.



We engage in a lot of discussions throughout the day – parents with your children, spouses with each other, pastors with parishioners, teachers with students, co-workers with each other, committee members around a table. There is a distinction, however, between discussion and dialogue. The word 'discussion' has the same root as the words 'percussion' (as in beating a drum) and 'concussion' (as in a fall that bangs and injures the head). There's a force implied – a hitting or pounding. Often our discussions can follow this form. Ideas get batted around. A couple of them are accepted by people and many more are rejected. However, dialogue is something different. In true dialogue there's a free flow of meaning, everyone is involved, differing opinions are valued and encouraged. People learn from one another. Most of us have experienced rough and tumble discussions resulting in winners and losers, especially these past

two years of pandemic and political struggle. However, the image of Jesus that we are presented on this Feast of Christ the King offers something different. Jesus' form of influence is more like a flow of shared meaning where people come to a revelation of the truth together.



In John's gospel for today's feast, a powerful scene of confrontation, Jesus tries to engage Pilate in just such a dialogue. Pilate, however, is a political person and he asks only political questions. He can only see things from a perspective of this world. He's not interested in the spiritual message that Jesus offers. He knows what kings are, where they come from and how they behave; and he will have none of that competition to his throne, so he asks outright: *"Are you the King of the Jews?"* Pilate catches none of the distinction between an earthly realm and another reality. He hears only the word "king," and he wants that clarified. Jesus obliges him and tries to explain the nature of his kingdom. It is not like the kingdoms of this world, built on violence and maintained by force.

Recall the scene from Luke's gospel at the time of Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter, in a preemptive strike, cuts off the ear of the High Priest's servant with his sword as guards come to arrest Jesus. Jesus says simply, *"No more of this,"* and heals the man, restoring his ear. The

beginning of violence is the end of dialogue. Ears have to be restored for dialogue to happen and for violence to end. Jesus refuses the sword of Peter. *If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over. But as it is, my kingdom is not here.* The world that Jesus comes from, this kingdom which does not originate from this world, relies on love as its only strategy and protection. The approach that Jesus takes before the power of Rome, and before any earthly power, is not muscle or force, only the magnetism of divine love. *Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.*

Jesus doesn't terrorize us with threats of worldly disasters or punishments when we die. He forsakes any arrogance or intimidation even when we fail to understand Him or stumble on our path. His way certainly exempts torture and violence as a way of winning people over. All those kind of strategies, so prevalent in the kingdom of earth, have no place in the Kingdom Jesus proclaims. He is the One who knows how to witness and wait. He invites us to listen to his voice and to receive his truth. He has made us, as the Book of Revelation tells us, "into a kingdom, priests for our God." We share the common priesthood of all believers – men and women, boys and girls.



Each time we say the Lord's Prayer: *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,* we are making a pledge to live in this world as Jesus did, to forgo force

as a way of relating to one another and to have only one thing that binds us – the bond of love. How have we made Christ sovereign in our hearts and homes in the past year? To what power have we given our heart's allegiance? How have we moved from argument to discussion to true dialogue in our relationships? How have we tried to change our world from using violence as a solution to our problems to seeking authentic dialogue that results in compassion and understanding? Are we a people consumingly engaged in the struggle for peace? Until that kingdom comes, you and I have a lot of baptismal and priestly work to do. It can be done; Jesus stands before Pilate and before all worldly powers offering another way -- the way of truth, the way of God's kingdom, the way of love.



May we stand courageously and firmly with Christ our King.

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