

## Christ the King, Nov. 20, 2022, Year C

- Some of you may be as excited as Martha and I are about the release of the new fifth season of *The Crown*. As we saw recently, while viewing the various aspects of the Queen's funeral, the British Royal Family is a source of enduring fascination for many of us. **And yet**, I think we -as Americans- have a hard time *imagining what it means* to live **with** and **under** a monarch's sovereignty. Since the founding of our country as a *republic*, this framework for our government has made it difficult for us to understand what it means to have a king or a queen. Especially when these roles are transmitted through **heredity**, rather than resulting from whom we **designate** through **our political will**.
- All this is especially significant for us today, when we observe the feast of Christ the King. For consciously or not, we are prone to *an ancient heresy*. It is this: in believing that, *by willing faithfully to serve* as the Messiah, Jesus was an *ordinary* but particularly faithful human being who was somehow '**promoted**.' That is, *promoted above and beyond* his human family, to *achieve a semi-divine* status. It is easy to mis-read the passion narratives at the end of the Gospels and so come to this misunderstanding. For in one way or another, the Gospel writers -especially in John's Gospel- portray Jesus' *Crucifixion*, and his subsequent Resurrection and Ascension, as the sequence of *his royal 'coronation'*.
- **And yet**,...and yet... in a monarchy like that of Britain, *coronation does not suddenly make* the *forthcoming* king or queen *into* something that *he or she was not before then*. Instead, a traditional coronation is *an act of public declaration* of what *he or she has always been*, even if only *implicitly*.
- In other words, through a public ceremony of coronation **we** do not **make** kings or queens. Instead, as we will see next year with King Charles, who we should note is **already** king, his future **coronation** will **recognize** in an official public way how *he has already begun to fulfill* his sovereign role. This is very

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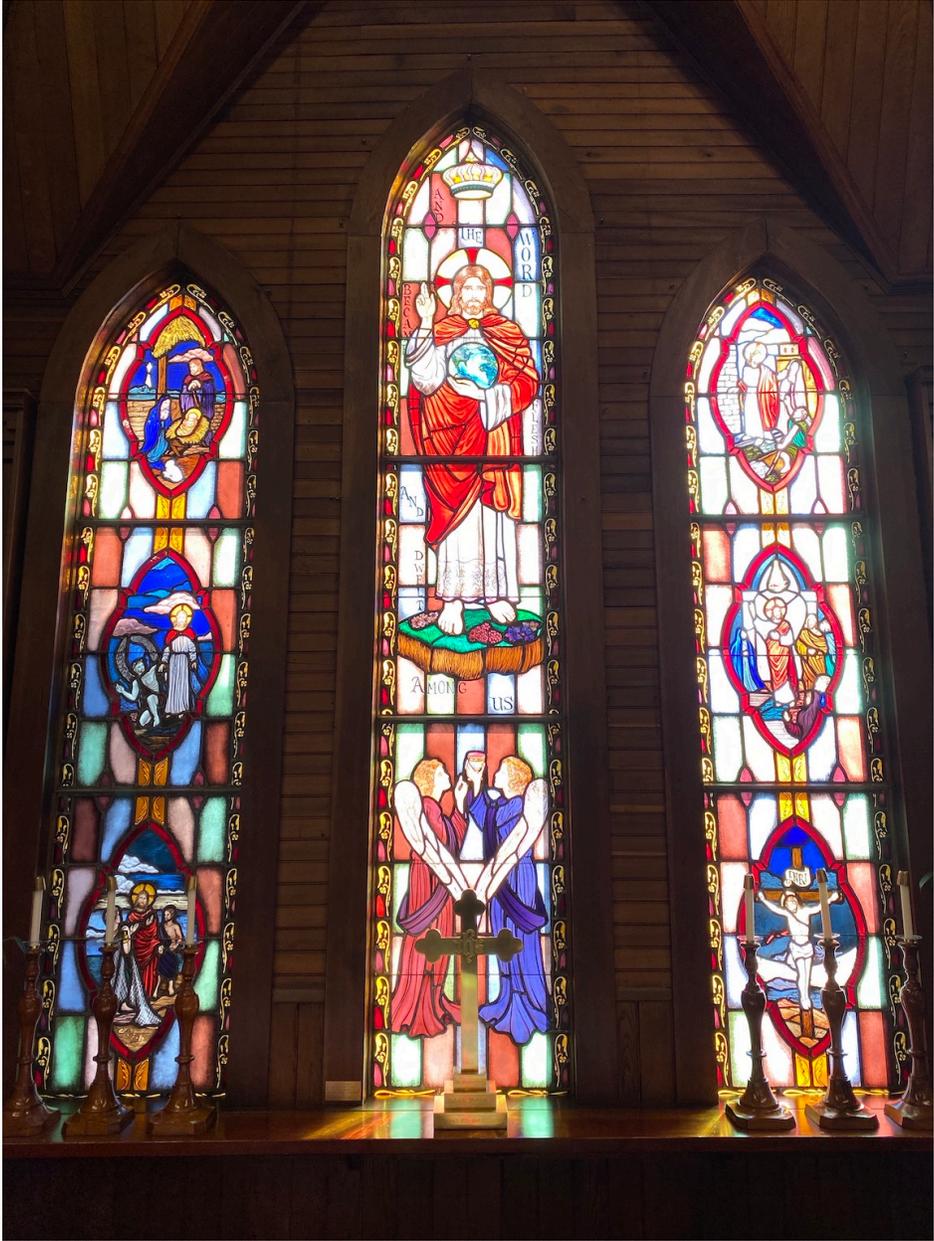
important for how we appreciate 'the mock coronation' of Jesus in our Gospel today.

- As Luke tells in that reading, Jesus is crucified under an inscription that Pilate has written, "*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Judeans.*" The crowd at the place of the crucifixion *protests* at the inscription. And following their lead, the soldiers *mock* him, saying, "*If you **are** the King of the Jews, save yourself!*" They mock him unconsciously *mimicking the words of Satan* during Jesus' temptations in the wilderness.
- The irony here is that, so far as we know, Jesus *never* directly said of himself, "*I **am** the King of the Jews.*" And yet, *he dies for having assumed this identity*, an identity that has been revealed in his *teaching* and in his *works*, and in *his selfless fulfillment* of the Scriptures.
- None of them, and none of us, *makes* or *declares* him to be the King. For his *royal identity has always been with him*. For it has been revealed by God, whom he calls his own Father. For Jesus to be **King** in the sense of being the **Messiah**, the Son of God, means that he lived *into the reality of God's own kingship of Israel*. The paradox of his vocation derives directly from the paradox of Israel, who long ago asked for an **earthly** king, *just like the other nations* had. What they did *not* realize at the time, *nor* for many centuries thereafter, was that to **prefer** having an **earthly** king *amounted to rejecting* God as their **true** king.
- Now, *the world we engage everyday* makes it difficult for us to hear and accept **Gospel words about Jesus and kingship**. These words imply a decisive moment of *confrontation*. The soldiers at the crucifixion, represent the **power** of **earthly** might as they confront Jesus, who represents the **authority** of **divine** truth. So, an **earthly** nation, relying upon fear and coercive power, challenges a **heavenly** kingdom. It is difficult for us to hear

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and appreciate this confrontation because we are lulled into taking *one side* of it. *But which side?*

- *Well*, if I ask about which side we identify with, it's hard to imagine anyone choosing to *stand with* the power of the Roman Empire. *And yet...* think about the casual observers *who see us* every day. ~ What do they conclude about **our** allegiance? By how we *live* and *work*, and not just by what we say, how much do we *exemplify* a belief that there is a **higher** kingdom that is **not** of *this world* ~ one that embodies the authority of God's truth, and which holds to account **all** regimes, dominions, nations, and peoples?
- The glorious authority of Christ the King is beautifully portrayed in a stained glass window {*note the handout*}. It is in the chapel of a church in Highlands, North Carolina. In it, we see *the one who became the good shepherd*, who is now sovereign over the cosmos, standing under a monarch's crown. As the old folk hymn puts it, "*he holds the whole world in his hands.*"
- Believing in Christ the King involves believing *not only* that we are **presently one with him**, in the Spirit. It also involves believing that **he will come again** in royal glory. For he will bring to *completion* and *fulfillment in our experience* all that he accomplished through his death, resurrection and ascension. Using the words of Charles Wesley (which surely we will soon sing during Advent), it means believing that when "Christ the Lord returns to *reign* {as king,} every eye shall... behold him...; [even] those who set at nought and sold him, pierced and nailed him to the tree..."
- We may be tempted to lament that *we do not see him now*, and that we have to *wait*. **But we do see him** ~ in the ways that *he has chosen* to reveal himself ~ *in ourselves and in each other*. Most especially, we see him *in the sacrament of the Eucharist*, our foretaste of the full revealing of his glory.



Windows over the chapel altar; Church of the Incarnation, Highlands, NC

**Luke 23:33-43**

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. The people stood by, watching Jesus on the cross; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

**Canticle 18 A Song to the Lamb** *(from Revelation 4:11, 5:9-10, 13)*

Splendor and honor and kingly power \*  
are yours by right, O Lord our God,  
For you created everything that is, \*  
and by your will they were created and have their being;  
And yours by right, O Lamb that was slain, \*  
for with your blood you have redeemed for God,  
From every family, language, people, and nation, \*  
a kingdom of priests to serve our God.  
And so, to him who sits upon the throne, \*  
and to Christ the Lamb,  
Be worship and praise, dominion and splendor, \*  
for ever and for evermore

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Notes