

Solemnity of Christ the King (C)
(2Samuel 5:1-3 / Luke 23:35-43)
24.11.2013

If Pilate were asking us today, as he asked Jesus: “So you are a king?” (Jn 18:37), the conscience of our weakness and our failures, and maybe our humility, would prevent us from giving a positive answer. And yet according to our Christian faith, because of our baptism, we “are made sharers (...) in the kingly office of Christ” (LG 31), “Christ has communicated us the gift of royal freedom” (CCC 908). For his part, the psalmist reminds us that we “have been made a little lower than God, and crowned with glory and honour” (Ps 8:5).

The good news is that, in Jesus Christ, human life is crowned with glory and honour. We must therefore treat ourselves, and one another, with the honour due to a likeness representing the King of kings.

This solemnity of Christ the King is thus our feast too. To acknowledge Christ as our King is to give thanks to God for our share in Christ’s kingship. This feast is really an opportunity for us to reconnect with our royal vocation.

A 3rd century Rabbi, Joshua ben Levi, said: “A procession of angels pass before man wherever he goes, proclaiming: ‘Make way for the image of God’.” Another Jewish author goes as far as to say: “Angels go before man and proclaim: ‘Give honour to the image of the Holy King, (...) to the precious countenance of the King” (quoted in *Moral Grandeur...*, p. 85).

And this is true not only of one human being or of one particular nation but of all men and women and of all nations. So it must be clear to us that it is not possible to show reverence for Christ the King and at the same time to despise or neglect a man, woman, or child who has been endowed with Christ’s likeness. This situation is of far-reaching consequences for all of us.

In our society, in our communities and families, do we really “give honour to the image of the Holy King” in all men and women?

We are talking here about utter reverence for life, for all that is necessary for human life. Do we respect the physical, psychological, emotional, educational needs of all men and women? Do we care for all those who are on the margins of our closed families and communities?

I could go on like that for a long time with a long list of questions... The radical conversion for us Christians is not only to keep our eyes fixed on Christ the King, but, to look at one another, allow me the expression, as members of the royal family of Christ.

The author of the Book of Lamentations is highly aware of our dignity. When he wants to describe the disgrace which has befallen the people, the complete disaster which threatens the very existence of God’s people, he writes: “The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, for we have sinned” (5:16).

Sin, in our lives and in the world, is unceasingly trying to make us forget our dignity and our status in God’s eyes. Sin will always make us less than we are as human beings and as children of God. In the literal sense of the word, sin degrades us, it brings us a step below who and what we are called to be.

It is interesting to notice that in the Scriptures, the notion of kingship is often associated with that of victory. We must read this connection as a call for us, as we claim our royal dignity, to fight and to win in our struggle with sin. But let us not be misled, the first

battlefield is our own heart, our personal lives. Again the 2nd Vatican Council teaches us that our first and most eloquent way to participate in Christ's kingly office is to "overcome the reign of sin" in ourselves (*LG* 36).

Thomas Merton expresses it well when he writes: "We are struggling human beings, sinners fighting for our lives, prisoners fighting for freedom, rebels taking up spiritual weapons against the powers that insult our human dignity."

We have to remember that the struggle has been won by Christ the King and that, as we read in the book of Proverbs: "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord" (21:31).

Not only do we believe that Christ is victorious but we learn from him how to share in his victory. In the prophet Zechariah, we hear the famous words: "Lo, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey" (9:9).

Christ the King shows us that the best weapons for the battle are humility, gentleness and determination in fidelity to one's values and purpose in life.

Obviously, Jesus never told us that it would be an easy struggle. Let us not forget that our Gospel reading shows him being lifted up, enthroned on the Cross not raised on a golden and comfortable seat of honour! However we do not have to be angry, agitated, or fearful at this. To mirror the violence of the violent, or the inflexibility of the hard-hearted would just lead us to defeat and exile us from the Kingdom of God.

Whether it is about sin in ourselves or about sin in the world, Christ the servant King is our model and the Gospel is our handbook. If we are faithful in the small things that the Lord has confided to us, if we are perseverant in ploughing in the field of our hearts so that it may bear much good fruit, then as St James promises us we "will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him" (1:12).