

Christ the King, C (Luke 23:35-43)

The story is told of a group of American tourists being guided through that marvelous museum, The Louvre in Paris. They had stood before such masterpieces as the "Venus de Milo", the "Winged Victory," the "Mona Lisa." As they left the museum, one of the men was heard to say: "I don't see anything so great about all this." And the guide replied: "You will forgive me sir, but this art is no longer on trial. We are."

That is certainly the case when we look upon the life of Jesus. Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King, yet judged by human standards, he was one of the most dismal failures of history. He never made much money. At the time of his death, his total estate appears to have been the clothes on his back. No one ever points to him as an example of financial success. In this regard, he was a miserable failure. Not only that, he had very little of what we call "power." His political clout was less than zero. He didn't even have enough influence to keep himself from being crucified. When it came to knowing the right people, the people of influence, Jesus was an utter failure. "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, the chosen one," as he was jeered at in today's Gospel. "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself," and that was the inscription hanging above him on the cross.

Yet we all know that he is no longer on trial. We are. Our standards of success and failure don't sit in judgment on him. It's the other way around. He sits in judgment on our standards. He is the standard by which all of life is judged. His concept of success may be different from our concept of success. His concept of success boils down to doing little things for little people. It involves feeding the hungry; giving water to the thirsty; welcoming the stranger; providing clothing for the naked; consoling the sick; visiting the prisoner. No special talent is required to do any of those things. And very little money is needed. It just takes a little bit of time and effort.

Some of us dream of doing great things if we had the power or the resources. We could change the world if we only won the lottery, or became president, or at least majority leader in Congress or speaker of the House. We would end poverty in the world, everybody would have full employment, no one would be hungry and would have a decent place to live. All little kids would have warm clothes and loving parents. Every refugee camp would be closed. We don't have the power to do all of this, but just a little. We can help out in homebound ministry, or hospitality, or the St. Vincent de Paul Society, or sharing your faith in RCIA, a few of the many ministries in most parish communities. Jesus said, "As long as you did it to one of my least brothers or sisters, you did it to me." That's the kind of King he is. He has many disguises, probably the person most in need that you would least suspect, perhaps even the person who gets on your nerves at work, or the lonely person who pesters you.

In Robert Bellah's book, Habits of the Heart, he addresses the American habit of isolation and individualism, people feeling responsible only for themselves, not having the ability to form communities of trust. "I do my thing and don't get involved." The call of Christ the King to each of us is to be involved, to touch the lives of each other with compassion and care, to be counter cultural if you will, to see Jesus in each other. Let us give thanks for the powerful example and presence of Jesus who touches us in new, surprising, and peaceful ways. Let us build his kingdom, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.

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