

Feast of Christ the King - 2013

Just before I came to be pastor here 25 years ago I spent the five previous years of my life at St. John's Seminary counseling priesthood candidates.

Every year of my seminary assignment I would travel with the seminarians to the Holy Land as they spent five weeks of their lives studying near Jerusalem. When I returned, my friends and relatives would all ask me one question; and it was not:

- how much did I learn about the Bible, or**
- did I get any insights into my faith, or**
- had I discovered more about Jesus' life and culture.**

No, the question was always the same: Is it safe over there!

Now twenty five years later in my assignment in Northwest Detroit, my family and friends ask question is the same: is it safe there!

My answer about Jerusalem and Detroit always seems to be the same: of course it is if you just are a little street wise.

But maybe my family and friends have a better insight about life than I do. The fact is, we live in a violent world. We live in a world filled with war and retribution. We live in a world of rape; We live in the world filled with the murders of people like Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy and so many other nameless men women and children. Some people use guns to express violence, others use words, and still others intimidate us with their actions.

Right from the beginning of Bible with the story of Cain killing Abel, violence has ruled our world. Maybe the question is not: “Do we live in a violent world?” Maybe the question should be, “How do I choose to live in violent world; what is a Christian response to violence?”

In today’s gospel, Jesus responds to violence. The religious and civil leaders are threatened by Jesus who claims to be a king and messiah. His way of life threatens the security of religious and civil leaders of his day. But he does not back away from his appointed task to announce the Reign of God. He comes to Jerusalem, the center of religious and political activity, and teaches a new way of living.

In his book *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, René Girard, professor of language and culture at Stanford University, Girard shows how Christ faces violence. He says that Jesus dismantles the triangle of desire, violence, and revenge. (expand: slap you on one cheek; offer him your other. Forgive 70 x 7)

In Christ there is no envy, greed, or lust for power. He, the innocent king who executes no one, is executed. He seeks no vengeance....There is no other cause for his death than the love of one’s neighbor lived to the very end.

We, his followers, acknowledge Christ as our God and king. We accept his reversal of the violence that dominates humanity. A non-violent god can only signal his existence to mankind by having himself driven out by violence in the Kingdom of Violence. That is why Jesus would say, “My kingdom is not of this world.”

Today we celebrate the Feast of Christ, the King. As we hear in today's gospel, the title nailed above his head on the cross was, *Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews*.

Most of the Jews rejected his reign in their hearts. Most bystanders, the soldiers and even one of the men executed beside him mocked him. "If he is the King of the Jews, let him save himself."

But there were a few, just a few of his contemporaries who heard and took to heart his good news.

There was the criminal to his right who said, "Lord remember me when you come into your reign".

There was his mother, a few women and John at the foot of the cross. And in time his closest disciples came to believe in his reign.

How about you and me, my brothers and sisters? Is Christ King for us? Is his way of non-violent response to the violence which permeates our world today...is his response going to be ? Only when we acknowledge Christ as our King and our way of living can we accept his way of reversing the violence that dominates humanity today.

And so, the next time you are faced with violence, whether that be

- in on the street, or
- in school or the workplace, or
- in your home,

how will you respond?

Will it be with more violence or will it be a response which signs that the Kingdom of God is in our midst?

Today we celebrate the Feast of Christ our King. Tomorrow we will have many opportunities to put our faith into action.