

The True Greatness

“*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*”: such were the words of the inscription fixed above Jesus nailed to the Cross of Calvary. Now, that inscription was placed there by order of Pilate. So it was the Roman authority in Jerusalem who thus officially proclaimed the royalty of Jesus of Nazareth.

This sign did not please the chief priests. They went to Pilate and asked him to change the wording: “*You should not write, ‘King of the Jews,’ but ‘This man said: I am King of the Jews.’*” (Jn 19:21)

We can see that it was under circumstances that were incomprehensible, humanly speaking, but foreordained by God, that the Savior of the world was proclaimed “king” by the public authority of that time. Why such a tragic situation for such a proclamation? Jesus was utterly powerless, and it was then that He was proclaimed king! What a mystery!

As we see things humanly, Jesus ought to have been declared king when the opportune moment presented itself to Him. For example, after the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, people were saying, “*This really is the prophet who is to come into the world.*” *Jesus, who could see they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, escaped back to the hills by himself.*” (Jn 6:14-15)

Jesus is king; that is a truth. But He did not want to be recognized as such before His hour or in a human manner, but in accordance with the wisdom of His Father: at the hour of His triumph over Evil. Now there you have the foresight of God! There you have the reign of God over souls! Jesus said to Pilate, “*Mine is not a kingdom of this world.*” (Jn 18:36) The kingdom of Jesus is not of this earth but of Heaven! What Jesus wants at any price, even at the price of His death on the Cross, is to reign over consciences.

It is true that men had never imagined greatness as God sees it. It had always been thought that, in order to be great one had to dazzle, crush, dominate. It was thought that, in order to reign, one had to impose oneself, possess riches and have subjects obedient out of fear.

Now, what was essentially new, with Christ, was the concept of greatness that was unknown to men. The majesty of Christ the King goes hand in hand with His generosity. His greatness lies in His being infinitely good, His glory, in knowing how to give, His nobility, in giving Himself, in

giving the entirety of His being and in giving His all through the gift of Himself.

Christ the King, who brings us the revelation of the true God, is nailed to the Cross; and this is the opportunity for Him to manifest an infinite generosity capable of opening our hearts to the imitation of His abnegation. Jesus on the Cross reveals to us that God’s will is that we should become what Jesus Himself is – generous, magnanimous, merciful. That is the meaning of the words of Saint Hippolytus: “*If you obey his holy directions, if, in being good, you imitate him who is good, you will become like unto him and he will fill you with honor. For God is not a mendicant, he who has made you god also, for his glory.*” (French-language breviary, no. 1, 6th day in the octave of the Nativity, Office of readings, p. 280)

If God willed to transmit Himself to men, it was precisely because He is eternal Love, infinite Charity, the perfect Gift, preoccupied solely with giving Himself and with touching us through His Love, to the end that we may unite ourselves with Him through our love.

Christ is truly king, but a king who asserts Himself only by means of Love and in appealing to the liberty of each of His “subjects”. Through the Holy Spirit, He communicates to us His own life; He seeks no personal advantages, for He is king only for the benefit of those to whom He offers His divine gifts.

The Gospel tells us that two thieves were crucified beside Him. One of them understood that the man there was a just man. He declared to his companion in torment: “*In our case we deserve it, we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.*” (Lk 23:41) He let himself be touched by grace, and compensating for the insults proffered Jesus, he did not hesitate to proclaim the kingship of Jesus: “*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*” (Lk 23:42)

This is a very great profession of faith in Christ’s kingship, for it also expresses belief in the ultimate resurrection. So while the good thief saw on the cross a disfigured, bleeding man, he also showed that he believed in that man’s kingdom of love and mercy over and beyond death.

And even before He left this world, Jesus declared to him, “*Indeed, I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise.*” (Lk 23:43) Those words were addressed to a genuine criminal who deserved the fate that befell him. Jesus made a truly royal

gesture, that of pardoning. Because He is king, He had the power to show grace to the thief, that is to say, to grant him the grace of salvation. He liberated one condemned to death and became the Savior of whom we had need. For that felon saved by reason of his faith is each one of us. As Saint Paul reminds us: “*God wanted all perfection to be found in him and all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, when he made peace by his death on the cross.*” (Col 1:19-20)

To all of us, we “who are of the same blood” as the thief, of the race that betrays God, a royal road is presented. The merciful Christ invites us to become kings along with Him through becoming dispensers of mercy and pardon. Such is the Kingdom that is not of this world. Acting thus is the true way to celebrate the feast of Christ the King.

Let us acclaim Christ the King in the Eucharist and receive Him in the uttermost depths of our being so that, transformed by His glorious Body and Blood, we may be able to attain the glory of Paradise.

On the feast of her Presentation in the Temple, let us ask Mary to impart to us the sentiments of her Heart so that we may receive more worthily the Holy Eucharist, to the end that Jesus may give us to the fullest degree His Holy Spirit. May He reign over the whole of our life and, thereby, over the whole of the world!

Nov. 21, 2004 **Fr. Maurice Pélouquin**

An Exceptional Triduum

I am plunged in the reading of the issue no. 169 of the paper which allows us to increasingly deepen last September’s exceptional Triduum.

We must continue to live amid the demands of our daily work even though we would like to be on our knees, convinced that we are but zeros. May we, in our small measure, collaborate in the coming of the terrestrial Kingdom in a spirit of love.

What a tremendous mystery we are witnessing! Besides all the texts which help us deepen the prophetic moments of the Triduum, I especially appreciated Marc Élie and Sylvie Payeur-Raynaud’s articles. How inspired these authors are and what talent they have for writing. Thank you for sharing this with us.

Louise Desrosiers