

November 25, 2018

Feast of Christ the King

When I was a college student at Mt Angel Seminary in Oregon, we studied the humanities from the beginning of written history in Egypt and Greece to the modern age. We studied the development of Western Civilization through the different disciplines of history, the governance of peoples, art, music, literature, science, medicine, philosophy, and religion and how they all influenced one another. The principal that guided our course was that we find the universal in the particular. Each area of particular discipline part of what we have come to know to be universally true.

We hear today from the 18th chapter of the Gospel of John, where Pilate questions Jesus about being King of the Jews he is asking a very particular question, Are you, Jesus, King of this one people, the Jews at this time and in this place. Jesus responds with a universal answer, "My Kingdom is not here . . . For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." If we were to read the next verse, Pilate would say, "Truth, what is truth?" The human story is about searching for the answer that very question.

Christians believe that truth is not something rather truth is someone, the presence of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the universal in the particular. Jesus is the one, true God, who created all that exists and we can find all that is in him. There is no one who is more universal than Jesus Christ is! Jesus is fully human, he was born in a particular time and place and he lived his life for thirty-three years. He learned carpentry from his step-father, Joseph, he fasted in the desert, was tempted, he live three years of public ministry and soon people noticed that he taught like no other, he did things that no one else did. He healed the man born blind; he raised Lazarus from the death after he had been in the tomb for four days. He died a particular death, the death of a criminal on the cross, and it was his body and no other that died on that cross. He rose from the dead in his own body, so that all of humanity could have the hope of rising together with him. Every year on the last Sunday of the Church year, we proclaim him as "Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe" because we believe that all the particulars of human history in the end of time will return to him.

Today, Mary Jo Longley is making a personal decision prepare to follow Jesus Christ through the Catholic Church as she begins the process of RCIA. We know that the word Catholic means “universal.” Mary Jo’s decision, as with every follower of Jesus has to be a personal one. Jesus ignites our faith when we have a personal encounter with Jesus. That is what it means to know Jesus in a particular way. One way to understand the Catholic faith as universal is to realize that our personal decision to follow Jesus has universal meaning. Literally, the kingdom of God comes into our hearts to dwell. That is what we celebrate in every Eucharist. As the words to the song, “Gift of finest Wheat says”, “What the whole world cannot contain comes into our hearts to dwell.” It begins with Jesus and me, but it does not end there. Jesus comes to us in the particular to leads us to his presence in the universal. The very reason that Pope Pius XI established the celebration of Christ the King of Universe was because he was very troubled by what he saw happening in the world. He saw the rise of communism that forbade the freedom of religion and that government of Mexico had outlawed the Catholic Church. While he might not have been able to predict the rise of Nazi Germany in particular, he had the universal view that when governments do not recognize that Christ as King over every nation, they will fall into the oppression of peoples and will have dire consequences. He wrote, “Once men recognize, both in private and in public life, that Christ is King, society will at last receive the great blessing of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony.” (43. Pope Pius XI, *Quas Primas*, December 11, 1925).

Our private, personal and particular decision to follow Jesus had communal, worldwide and universal meaning. The peace of Christ that overcomes sin in our hearts will open up the possibility for Christ’s kingdom of justice and peace to be more visible in the world. No matter how bad things may be in our personal lives or in the world, Christ’s victory over sin and death will reign at the end of time. Long live Christ the King in our hearts and in our world!