

Solemnity of Christ the King

Feast of Christ the King

November 24, 2019

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This is a feast day dear to the hearts of anyone who has made the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. In the “Second Week” of the Exercises is a meditation called, “Christ the King and His Call.”

When I made what is known as the Long Retreat (30 days) in the first year of being in the Jesuits, this meditation was key to convincing me that I had a vocation. In the meditation, Ignatius has the one making the retreat (in a variety of formats), consider Jesus Christ as he says to each person individually:

“It is my will to win over the whole world, to conquer sin, hatred, and death – all the enemies between humankind and God. Whoever wishes to join me in this mission must be willing to labor with me, so that by following me in suffering, he (she) may follow me in glory.”

Ignatius adds: “With God inviting and with victory assured, how can anyone of right mind not give him/herself over to Jesus and his work” – of building the Kingdom. Who is this Jesus? He is Son of God and son of David (through the lineage of Joseph)

In the Second Book of Samuel (5:1-3), we read that David was a ‘shepherd-king,’ divinely selected. He was a man of the people with, as Pope Francis expressed it, “the smell of the sheep upon him”. His reign lasted for more than three decades. In his Letter to the Colossians (1:12-20), St. Paul takes us on a lyrical journey to understand who Jesus is:

The Center of the universe

The icon of God as being the personification of God’s wisdom

The head of the church

The one in whom the saving love of God has become transparent

In him all things find their meaning, cohesion, and finality. He has delivered us from the power of darkness. Through his public ministry, passion, death, and resurrection he has reconciled us to God. This is something that the Good Thief on his cross, experienced in a profound way (Luke 23:35-43):

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

“Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

St. Ignatius had a great devotion to Jesus; it began during his convalescence from the wounds he suffered in a battle with the French army, at Pamplona. Wishing to fill up the boring hours of his confinement, he asked his sister-in-law if there were any novellas (romantic novels) in the house. Her response was not what he expected; all they had were a life of Christ and a book on the saints. With no other option, he started with the Life of Christ. When he was well, he set out for the Holy Land to “walk in the footsteps of Jesus.” He wanted to stay there forever, but because of various dangers he had to return to Spain.

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What is it about Jesus that drew Ignatius? What is it about Jesus that attracts you? I very much like the following reflection by Jesuit Bob Fabing on these questions:

“We are drawn to Jesus by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are drawn to Christ Jesus. There is an inner attraction which invites us to him. Something touches our heart. There is a call within us. Something stirs us up. There is a desire and need for us to believe in him. This is an inspiration of grace.”

CONCLUSION

I began this Homily with the meditation, “Christ the King and His Call.” How might we respond, in words, to his invitation? Ignatius gave us a good prayer; it’s called “Prayer for Generosity.”

Eternal Word, only begotten Son of God,
Teach me true generosity.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve.
To give without counting the cost,
To fight heedless of wounds,
To labor without seeking rest,
To sacrifice myself without thought of any reward
Save the knowledge that I have done your will.

AMEN.

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