

HOMILY SUNDAY 34 – C* (Homily 02)
“Let Jesus be Your Lord and King”

(2 Samuel 5:1-3; Colossians 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43)

After living a full life, Doug Berry, the former Winnipeg Blue Bomber coach, died. When he got to heaven, God was showing him around. They came to a modest little house with a faded Blue Bomber flag in the window. “This house is yours for eternity, Mack,” said God. “This is very special; not everyone gets a house up here.” Doug felt special, indeed, and walked up to his house. On his way up the porch, he noticed another house just around the corner. It was a gorgeous white and green three-story mansion with a 50-foot tall flagpole with an enormous Saskatchewan Roughrider flag, and in every window, he could see Saskatchewan fans dressed in green and white. Doug looked at God and said, “God, I’m not trying to be ungrateful, but I have a question. I was a good coach, ran a clean program, took the Bombers to the Grey Cup, and came close to winning a national championship.” God said, “So what do you want to know, Doug?” Doug asked: “Well, why does Kent Austin, the former Saskatchewan coach, get a better house than me?” God chuckled and said, “Doug, that’s not Kent’s house; that’s mine.”

Put your faith, not in football coaches nor in material things, but in Christ as Lord and King.

This feast of Christ the King was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 to counter totalitarian regimes that denied God and Church, like that in Mexico at the time. The main idea behind this feast is ancient - Christ reigns, and Jesus is Lord

The readings for today reveal two different images or perceptions of a king. In the first reading from the book of Samuel, all the tribes of Israel wanted David to be their king, and the elders anointed David king over Israel. This is very much the way that Eric Apetakagan became chief of the Norway House First Nation. After completing the three year Nathaniel Lay Formation program in Winnipeg, his heart was set on full time ministry within our archdiocese. However, before that came to pass, twenty elders from the community met with him and petitioned him to run for chief. After consulting with us and receiving our blessing, he ran for chief and was elected.

For both King David and for Eric as chief, being elected king and chief meant taking on great responsibilities. However, that was balanced off by the many perks

and privileges that went along with the position, as well as a healthy salary and much prestige.

It is a strikingly different scenario in the Gospel for today. There we see a totally different kind of king. This king had thorns and not diamonds for a crown, a cross instead of a royal chair for a throne, and nakedness instead of fine raiment for his garments. The difference could not be more radical than that.

This gospel according to Luke takes us back to Jesus in the desert just after his baptism. We are told that Jesus was actually driven by the Spirit into the desert to face Satan and the three temptations of power and pleasure (turning rocks into bread), fame and prestige (jumping off the Temple), and power and control (worshipping Satan to obtain all the kingdoms of the world). We know that Jesus rejected all three temptations out of his total fidelity and obedience to the love of the Father, and the devil left him to return at the appointed time.

That appointed time is the cross in today's gospel. Here we see Jesus tempted three times again. First the leaders scoff at him and taunt him to save himself if he is the Christ of God, the chosen one. Then the soldiers mock Jesus, calling for him to save himself if he is the King of the Jews. Finally, one of the criminals hanging beside Jesus derides him and challenges him to save himself, and them as well. Three times Jesus is tempted to use his divine power in a selfish way to serve himself.

As in the desert, where he was at his weakest, so it is here on the cross, where Jesus was experiencing the painful apparent absence of God. Nevertheless, out of absolute trust in the Father's love and rooted in his intimate relationship of prayer with the Father, Jesus practices a different kind of power – forgiveness, which is the power of powerlessness, the power of love, the power of compassion, the only power that will last into eternity.

Jesus demonstrates that power by forgiving the good thief and promising him Paradise that very day. It is interesting that this incident, which is sometimes used to argue that faith alone is what saves us, actually demonstrates that it is both faith and works that lead to eternal life.

Scott Hahn, in one of his tapes, points out that far from being faith alone, the good thief performs amazing works on the cross. He rebukes the other criminal; takes responsibility for his fate; repents of what he has done, witnesses to Jesus as King

in public, believes in Jesus, yes, and finally prays to Jesus for salvation, a salvation that is granted him.

When was the last time that we rebuked a sinner; took full responsibility for some sin, repented and confessed it, witnessed to Jesus in a public way, and prayed from the heart for salvation? The good thief may have done more good works on the cross than many a righteous person does in any given year.

Given this amazing image of a different kind of king, the key question for us is: is Christ reigning in me? Is he truly Lord of my life? Am I living for him, or am I still living for my self?

Mother Theresa of Calcutta remains one of the most striking examples of someone who truly understood this kind of king, and followed him closely in her life. Like Jesus, she also experienced the apparent absence of God from the moment she began her work founding the Missionaries of Charity.

Moreover, like Jesus, that spiritual desolation and dryness did not dissuade her from being totally faithful to the call to serve the poorest of the poor in Calcutta. She would invite all those who were thinking of abortion to give their children to her and she would care for them, and she did. What a powerful Christ figure she was, and still is for all who knew her and have heard of her.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a manifestation of this power of powerlessness, this power of love that is forgiveness. Through Word and Sacrament, the love of God demonstrated by Jesus on the Cross is made present for us. We who receive it are missioned to go out and to live the message of the cross in our own lives.

So remember, as we celebrate this feast of Christ the King, let us put our faith not in football coaches or any material thing, but in Jesus as Lord and King of our lives and follow him along our own way of the Cross.