

[Readings: 2 Sam 5:1-3; Ps. 122; Col 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43]

Can you believe that this Thursday is Thanksgiving Day already? I'm still stuck in September. As we gather around the dinner table on Thursday, we will eat turkey or ham and maybe walk on egg shells. We may pass the yams and walk around mine fields. In other words, we may enjoy the holiday as best we can with the people we are with! It is said that at family gatherings, it may be best to avoid topics regarding politics and religion, especially this year! If that's true, then I would be out of a job!

While the most recent Election Day is behind us, it'll be no time at all before our televisions once again will be taken over by the threats and promises of politicians. If we don't vote for this candidate, then the world will fall apart. But, if we vote for the right person, then salvation is at hand.

The equation of politics with salvation should be troubling for Catholics. Certainly, the common good is definitively at stake in these elections. The unborn must be protected against abortion; the poor must be cared for by society; racism must be fought against; immigrants must be protected against injustice and violence; and above all, religious freedom should be respected.

Politicians should promote the common good as best as they can determine as limited creatures, incapable of knowing the results of all their actions. If they don't, it's the job of us Catholics to take them to task for this negligence. Nonetheless, this or that politician will not save us. They can't.

Human beings suffer from a deeper malaise than the politician can respond to. We suffer from what St. Augustine calls the lust for domination. We don't only want to be right or prudent. We want to be in charge. We want to be God.

The solemnity of Christ the King is a prophetic day in the United States, especially as contentious election cycles loom. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is mocked by those obsessed with the lust for domination. The soldiers mock Him, asking Him to reveal his power. The rulers sneer, "If you're so great, save yourself!"

In the Gospel of Luke, it's only the good thief who recognizes the actual source of real power. He turns to Christ, the only source of salvation, asking to be remembered when our Lord Jesus comes into the kingdom. He professes faith in Jesus as the savior -- not Pilate, not his fellow thief, not even those who could release him from his suffering. Jesus Christ alone is king.

Catholics who engage in the public square would be wise to commit ourselves to the kingship of Jesus. This politician or that politician -- they won't save us. Jesus Christ alone is King. And that ironically gives us our power. We stand in the public square and acknowledge the politics of this age, dominated by suspicion and violence, by polling rather than the pursuit of truth, which is a symptom of the lust for domination. It's evidence that we're sick in our sins. Something's wrong.

So it with the Israelites in today's First Reading. Even when Saul, his predecessor was king, it was David who called the shots. The elders of the tribes of Israel knew it was David who really wore the crown and signed the checks, so to speak. Saul fell on his sword rather than surrender to the Philistines. Saul's three sons were already dead and gone, killed in battle. We would see David "anointed" two other times, by the tribes of Judah and then by those of Israel. He would be the "King of Kings" -- at least for our Old Testament Hebrew ancestors! David knew that the king was responsible for two tasks: to lead and to feed. The people are to be fed with the truth; they are to be led into fruitful action energized by the truth. The same is true for parents and all in authority. The seeming efficiency of dictatorship is enticing at times to every leader of individuals and groups -- even pastors! But true leadership is a byproduct of true faith. Faith moves one to lead humbly, by example and with love. David had such faith, and despite his many faults and failings, he returned to his faith regularly and became the model for all future kings of Judah and Israel. Death brings life. Faithfulness in suffering brings true and lasting freedom and peace, as we see with Jesus Himself on the cross. Alone. Abandoned. Naked. Humiliated. From all worldly assessments, one big, fat failure. A loser.

And, the Church tells us today, He is a King. In fact, the NEW King of

Kings! And yet, at the moment of His apparent ultimate failure -- death -- someone is hanging around next to Him saying, "I believe in You. I want to live with You when Your Kingdom finally arrives." And Jesus turns to him in love and says, "You will. You will be with me this day in Paradise."

On this last Sunday of the liturgical year, we stand on the edge of Paradise; we look through the Doorway of Heaven. All we have to do -- and it is no small thing -- is to put our hurts and slights into perspective. To drop our demand for restitution and vengeance. To realize our need to be re-created in the love of God. That our crosses lead us to crowns. In the shadow of the Cross, we are able to finally admit our need for healing, for peace, for God. In acknowledging our own need to forgive and to be forgiven, to love and to be loved, to minister and to be ministered to, Christ's promise of Paradise is ours.

We have lots to give thanks for on Thursday, Thanksgiving Day. Join us if you can for Mass at 9:30 AM with the special collection envelopes going towards our Christian Service outreach. And then afterwards, what?

Here's an idea. This Thursday, as we gather around in our living room, dining room, family room or restaurant, if we should find ourselves discussing religion or politics, let us do it not with anger and emotion, but with compassion and with curiosity. Compassion -- to speak in respectful tones and volumes. To try to look at the topic from the opposite point of view, and to identify its flaws.

And curiosity -- to discover why others take the opposite view from us.

Then to move beyond the differences to see what they may have in common, the shared values upon which we can build. To build bridges and not walls. To respect the basic decency of each other as made in the image, the icon, of God. And to enjoy a full and tasty meal in the process!

The solution won't be found through those who bear the mark of the elephant or the donkey. It will only be found in the self-giving love of the God-man, Jesus Christ, who forgives sin, transferring us from the age of darkness into the kingdom of light and peace. Come, Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe!