

Views from the Pews: The Feast of Christ the King

Today is the last Sunday of the Church's year, on which centuries of pious tradition has always envisioned the triumph of the imperialist vision of Christ as the ultimate King of kings, enthroned in the glory of heaven, all his enemies under his feet, the final victor over all evil. To his disciples privately, Jesus did not deny kingly status, but he tried hard to get them to understand that he was not the sort of king they had in mind for this life, or the next.

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. Luke 22: 25-26.

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.' John 13:12-14.

This was an idea that made no sense at all to those who first heard it. Even after hearing all Jesus' teaching, and witnessing the Resurrection, some of the disciples still couldn't get out of the iron grid of their expectations. As Jesus prepared to ascend back to the Father,

So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' Acts 1:6.

Understandably, people got excited about the prospect of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Those at the bottom of the existing social heap expected a longed-for new dawn of divine justice to break through immediately into the anticipated new creation; those at the top of the heap feared the consequences if it did. Jesus tried to explain that they all had the wrong idea completely:

The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you. Luke 17:20-21

Think for a minute: which version of kingship fits best with Jesus' own life and teaching? Why is his version (mutual footwashing and all) so challenging for us?

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