

Christ the King - B (2021)

Daniel 7:13-14

Revelation 1:5-8

John 18:33-37

“Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’”

There is an old story, one that you may have heard, which speaks directly to the theme of this Mass, the Solemnity of Christ the King. The incident happened many years ago now in a sculptor’s studio in Denmark. His name was Bertel Thorvaldsen. He had a dream, and that dream was to create the greatest statue of Christ the King ever made; and that is what he set out to do. So he began by sculpting a model in clay. It was a royal figure, a majestic pose, with head thrown back and arms upraised in a triumphant gesture. He had created his dream. *“This will be my masterpiece,”* he said,

Well, that night, that very night, the window of his studio was accidentally left open – and it rained heavily. Moisture and water blew in, and the sculptor returned in the morning to find a statue quite different from the one that he had left. Now the head of the figure was bowed down; the facial expression had been transformed from regal severity to compassion, and the arms had dropped from a posture of triumph to an attitude of humility and welcome.

The story goes that Thorvaldsen came in the next morning and stared at the figure for a long time, agonizing over the effort that he had wasted – and the need to begin all over again. Then something came over him to change his mind and to alter his understanding of the statue – and of Christ the King. He began to see this new image as the true one, as the real Christ. Finally, he approached the figure and wrote

in the softened clay of the newly shaped Christ, ‘*Come unto me*’. And that is the statue, that is the invitation, which still greet those who visit this masterpiece in the museum where it stands today in Copenhagen. And surely that is the answer which Christ gave by his life, when ...

“Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’”

On this day when we honour Christ as King, it may be a fitting time to remind ourselves what kind of King our Lord was – and to remember that his example is still to be our model. For our head is also to be lowered in humility; our expression is also to speak of compassion; our hands are also to be extended in welcome and peace.

Yet, if we are to be honest with ourselves, we may have to admit that there can be a temptation sometimes to think that, because of our position – or age or bank account, we deserve some special advantage or privilege. Shades of the majestic ‘king’! We may realize that we are doing this and expect it – and use our own way of getting what we want. On the other hand, we may not realize that we are making this expectation of others, maybe even of those whom we love a great deal. But, in either case, that is not the way of Christ – and this Solemnity asks that we remember that.

So this may be the time to do a little inventory in that regard. For, with the beginning of the season of Advent, we are approaching days when we want most just to be at peace – within ourselves and with those around us. And, for that to happen in my life, I may have to reflect on those welcoming hands of Christ – and make them

my own. A few changes on my part – a request for forgiveness, a more humble attitude, a prayer for understanding – may make this Christmas one for which I have prayed. Maybe an early Advent reflection, prompted by the question ...

“Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’”