

In days gone by (when kings and queens ruled) everyone in the kingdom knew they weren't the king or queen. Our problem today is we don't have that same understanding. Our culture teaches that any of us can be king or queen. Any of us can rule whatever part of our world we want to control. That is why we get so frustrated with people, who don't think like us, or illnesses that we don't deserve, or problems that seem unfair.

A king or queen has absolute power and control, and when we find that we can't control everything that we want – whether we are a President or a parent, a janitor or a junior we get angry, confused, and complain about how unfair life has really become. Once upon a time, there was only one king ... today, we aren't so sure.

Most of our conflicts and much of our pain comes from such confusion about who is king? Who is ruler? Who controls our lives? Too many think that they are the power and deserve the throne and others seek to live hopelessly dependent on earthly rulers to take care of every need and lead in every moment of their lives. We are so confused about who should be king and what kind of kingdom in which we should live. That is why there is so much contentiousness in political struggles, why terrorists exist, and why nations go to war. Everyone is confused about who indeed IS King!

This was part of Pilate's issue as he was confronted with the man named Jesus. He couldn't understand if Jesus was a king, how and why his own people had arrested him and sent him to Pilate. How can you be a king if you are this weak? How can you be a king if priests have handed you over to die? Where was his army? How did Jesus let this happen? This isn't how Kings should act – what king of King was he?

Pilate was confused because in his experience might is right, the strongest wins, and the ruler with the biggest army sets the terms of surrender. He probably saw Jesus as some sort of wimp. But Jesus rebuked him with the pronouncement: "*my kingdom not of this world!*" You see Jesus was the strongest, he would win, and he would set the terms of surrender. And he did all of that by living as a different kind of king. Rather than demand death from his subjects to keep his kingdom on track, this king would give up his life as surrender and sacrifice for his subjects.

The reason Pilate and even the disciples didn't yet understand is that no one yet had seen Good Friday and Easter. Jesus had primed the pump by healing the blind, raising Lazarus from the dead, and eating with the poorest of the poor. Yes, he was a different kind of King, and that because his kingdom has nothing to do with earthly power and wealth, it will indeed last beyond the expanse and history of creation.

I have always been fascinated by the legends of Robin Hood. He lived in a world where selfishness and fear reigned supreme, because the King was off fighting in the Crusades. Robin and his follower remained faithful to the real king, resisted the evil powers that were ripping off the kingdom, and waited for the return of the real king. In many ways, he is like

the disciples we are called to be. We know who the real King is; it is just that we often get distracted by earthly pretenders to the throne. We are pulled away by our own busy-ness and attempts to control more than we have it in our power to control. The world we live in belongs to Christ the King, and he isn't far away fighting other battles, but is ignored by those who want to claim the right to control their own destiny, lives, and kingdom.

In communion and prayer, in baptism and fellowship, in the Word and the presence of the Holy Spirit Christ is with us and continues to reign supreme. And what has brought us into his kingdom of loving light is how he turned the world upside down by surrendering all of the pomp and circumstance, power and glory most would expect of a King. He sacrificed everything for his flock, even his earthly life, to reveal and proclaim the love that has set us free. He calls us now to participate in his kingdom by being his priests. By handling the holy sacrifices of our lives and lifting them high so that the entire world will know who is King.

We can look at St Francis of Assisi to understand the change that Jesus calls for each of us. He was an incredibly rich and powerful man, who gave up all of his wealth and prestige to serve God. He spent his life in prayer and service to the poorest of the poor and the lowliest of creation. No one can remember the name of the earthly King at that time, but we all know the name of St. Francis. What does that tell you about true power and which King we should follow?

The book of Revelation reminds us that no earthly powers can stand between us and Christ the King. With that promise in hand, will we be distracted by the noisy and self serving noises of the crowd or respond to the trumpet blast of Easter? Will we seek to have others serve me, or allow our lives to become songs of servant love?

I am reminded today of a young man in Toledo named Vince. His wife called about baptizing their young child – it was the week he discovered he had an inoperable brain tumor. After the baptism he had surgery, and two weeks after that his wife took his daughter and moved out of the house. The week he started radiation, she served him with divorce papers.

Vince spent the next three years working as a janitor in his church, working with his youth group, and always had a smile and radiated peace. He had everything that the world says is important stolen from him, and yet he had everything he needed because he knew who was King of his life -- in this world and the next. He had accepted his role as a servant priest, in the same way you and I are given that same opportunity.

The world's power will never understand, unless and until the world becomes a kingdom of priests serving the King who has surrendered everything for us. What a neat way to end an old year and begin a new one. With Christ as King!

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