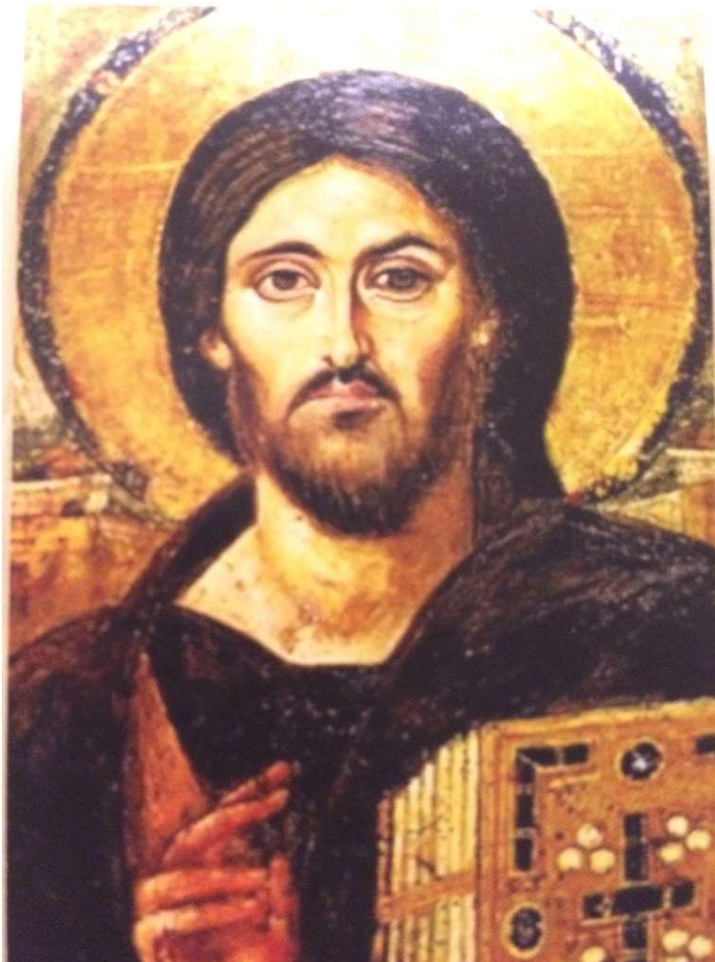


26th Sunday after Pentecost- Proper 29 (C)
Nov. 20, 2022
Christ Episcopal Church
Towanda, Pa.
Rev. Betsy W. Sentigar
“Jesus Remember Me When you come into Your Kingdom”



Today is the feast of Christ the King which was instituted on the last Sunday of Pentecost by Pope Pius XI December 11, 1925. This feast day is celebrated by Anglicans, Protestants, and Episcopalians as we are doing here today.

What does it mean to believe that Christ is King? How can we enlarge our perspective of this feast day? Kingship often denotes authority, power that is wielded by emperors, kings, military leaders or other secular rulers we are familiar with from our study of history. Control is often measured by force used to control, impose, or dominate in an absolute

passion. In Jesus' day, many thought of the coming messiah's kingship as a heavenly ruler who would set things right in the world with power over the ruling dominions.

To think of Christ's Kingship using human models calls us up short. It quickly limits our understanding of our Lord's authority and power. We know that many use Christianity as a weapon of control to subdue, criticize, or exclude others.

Today I brought with me an icon, entitled "The Pantokrator"- from the Eastern Christian tradition. The term Pantokrator literally means "Ruler of All". To call Christ Pantokrator goes beyond authority ascribed to a particular area, but is more extensive to include not just humanity but the whole world or *cosmos*.

The authority in Jesus' day, attempted to use their power to destroy him, being influenced by fear, rejection of his message and crucifixion to eliminate, they thought, his power.

↓ Jesus said many wonderful things, but rarely anything more wonderful than, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Christian forgiveness is an amazing thing. When Stephen, the first Christian martyr was being stoned to death, he too prayed, "Lord do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60). There is nothing so lovely and nothing so rare as Christian forgiveness. ¹

When the unforgiving spirit is threatening to turn our hearts to bitterness, let us hear again our Lord asking forgiveness for those who crucified him and his servant Paul say to his friends, " Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32). ²

¹ William Barclay. *The New Daily Study Bible - The Gospel of Luke* pg. 338

² *Ibid*

The idea that a terrible thing was done in ignorance runs through the New Testament. Peter later said to the people, I know that you acted in ignorance. (Acts 3: 17). Paul said they crucified Jesus because they did not know him (Acts 13:17). Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman emperor and stoic saint used to say to himself every morning, “ Today you will meet all kinds of unpleasant people. “They will hurt you, and injure you, and insult you. But you cannot live like that; you know better , for you are a [person] in whom the Spirit of God dwells.’ Others may have in their hearts the unforgiving spirit, others may sin in ignorance, but we know better. We are Christ’s men and women; we must forgive as he forgave. ³

It was of deliberate purpose that the authorities crucified Jesus between two known criminals. It was deliberately so staged to humiliate Jesus in front of the crowd and to[attempt to] rank him with the robbers. ⁴

Legend has been busy with the penitent thief. He is called by various names, Dismas, Demas, and Dumachus. One legend make him a Judean Robin Hood who robbed the rich to give to the poor. The loveliest legend tells how the holy family were attacked by robbers when they fled with the child Jesus from Bethlehem to Egypt. Jesus was saved by the son of the captain of the robber band. The baby was so lovely that the young brigand could not bear to lay hands on him but set him free, saying “O most blessed of children, if ever there comes a time for having mercy on me, then remember me and forget not this hour. ⁵ That robber youth who saved Jesus as a baby met him again on Calvary; and this time Jesus saved him.

The word Paradise is a Persian word meaning a *walled garden*. When a Persian king wished to do one of his subjects a very special honor he made him a companion of the

³ *Ibid* pg. 339

⁴ *Ibid* pg. 340

⁵ *Ibid*

garden which meant he was chosen to walk in the garden with the king. It was more than immortality that Jesus promised the penitent thief. He promised him the honored place of a companion of the garden in the courts of heaven. ⁶

Surely this story tells above all that it is never too late to turn to Christ. There are other things of which we must say, "The time for that is past. I am grown too old now." But we can never say that of turning to Jesus Christ. So long as our hearts continue to beat, the invitation of Christ still stands. It is literally true that while there is life, there is hope. ⁷

My deepest and profound prayer, which is never perfect, often fraught with distractions and what is called the monkey mind, is a continuous attempt of daily practice. It is the practice of silence, not talking to God, but waiting and praying that I hear or understand God's still small voice in the midst of my silence. All people who pray this way consider themselves beginners - every day, opening heart and mind, in a voiceless and listening posture.

This practice called contemplative practice might be five or twenty minutes of "dying," of letting go of the false self in order to experience the True Self, of letting go of the illusion of our separation from God in order to experience our inherent union with him. Prayer is quite simply a profound experience of our core - who we are as Paul says "hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3) - Richard Rohr

In this prayer, we come to know ourselves as children of God, hidden in Christ with God. We become one with all people in all places in the stillness of silence and scripture can open God's divine message to us in this time.

⁶ *Ibid* pg. 340

⁷ *Ibid*

Just a small sentence, reading of the day brings possibilities of insight which we might not otherwise encounter. A holy prescription, message, directive breaks into the day offering love and a fresh perspective.

We use this icon, the Pantokrator to help us pray. Praying to an icon may at first seem idolatrous, but we actually pray “with an icon”. The Pantokrator, that you see today is one of the oldest surviving ikons in the world, the original can be seen at the Monastery of St. Catherine in the Sinai peninsula, thus named the Sinai Pantokrator.

As one meditates with this ikon, one can see an image seeming to be possibly what Jesus looked like coming down from the oral traditions over many years describing his features. Iconographers will teach you that the most important features of an ikon are its eyes. One would then be instructed to “Pray with the ikon as if God were looking at you through the eyes of the ikon.” My personal experience with a particular ikon while in silence led me to profound tears where I knew myself to be recognized by the Holy Spirit in that space. I could not run nor hide from the truth of myself being revealed in that sacred time.

This kind of experience can offer one the overpowering sense of the Holy Spirit, Christ’s presence, seeing us through the power of image. All of our vulnerabilities, sensitivities, desires, faults are recognized with a disarming compassion, letting us know that we are completely known and loved.

For my mentor The Pantokrator experience was an overwhelming one which demonstrated that Christ the King is a Ruler of All not with force and violence, but with love - looking closely you will recognize that the eyes are very different, one being compassionate, one being diagnostic. My mentor was transformed in the love and compassion of Christ which he received in compassion, belovedness, and a complete sense of being known to Christ in this time. It was a transformative space which moved him to seek ordination in the Episcopal Church.

As an experience happened for my mentor with this Sinai Pantokrator, For me, the experience happened an ikon entitled “The Holy Virgin Mary - The Theotokos pregnant with Jesus” on an Advent retreat for Spiritual Directors.

It became transformative in that the Holy Spirit sees us for who we are including our gifts and our failings, but at the same time is the Spirit of Compassion, embracing us in healing love. It brought confidence and courage to acknowledge my call and move forward on this 19 year trajectory.

As we end our Christian calendar year with a difficult visit to the cross of our Lord Christ, we recognize that evil, once and for all, will not and cannot vanquish the love of God for all of us, despite living in the midst of our fallen creation. Experiencing the love and presence of God in our lives and in community with others, to know what forgiveness is, to be loved, and to be healed is to know that God is with us and within us. He does not forsake us, no matter what. Even death does not extinguish this love.

May we move toward Advent with the knowledge and love of Christ, remembering ourselves held within his incarnation and mission. For this and all his mercies, may God's holy name be blessed and praised through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*