

Homily
1AdventC
St. Bernard Church
Nov. 29, 2015

In today's Gospel from St. Luke, we hear about the second coming of Christ.

It might seem strange to start Advent, the season when we celebrate the first coming of Christ, by having a Gospel that describes His second coming.

Maybe this is a good time to reflect on God's basic plan of salvation, and where the first and second coming of Christ fit into that plan.

To do that, we have to focus on the kingship of Jesus, and how the role of Jesus as a king fits into both His first and second coming.

You might recall that last Sunday we celebrated the Feast of Christ the King. This feast was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 to help modern people have a better understanding and appreciation for Jesus as a king.

The Old Testament is filled with references to the kingdom of God. In Last Sunday's first reading, we heard this from the prophet Daniel's vision of heaven:

"I saw one like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; when he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, he received dominion, glory and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed."

The Jews expected a Messiah who would be both an earthly and a heavenly king.

Well, to put it mildly, God did not exactly give them what they expected.

In his first coming, Jesus came as an infant, born in a very humble place to very humble parents. His earthly life was almost a total secret for 30 years. After his public ministry, which lasted only three years, he was tortured and then crucified like a criminal. He had no army, no wealth, no earthly power. While he had repeatedly said that he had brought to earth the kingdom of God, when questioned before his death about whether he was a king, his response was confusing and vague, saying only that his kingdom was not of this world. After his death, his followers were confused, fearful and in hiding.

More than anything else, it was His crucifixion on the cross that caused confusion for the Jewish people in general and His followers in particular. Why would any king allow himself to be treated like that?

If God's plan could be compared to a big puzzle, it's as if God gave us, through Jesus, bits and pieces, but not the whole picture. Some of the bits and pieces are big ones, like the Church, the sacraments and the Bible.

Still, even if we receive the sacraments and strive to follow the teachings of the Church and the Bible, we can't be exactly sure how we're doing. And we're perplexed by all the confusion, all the chaos, all the suffering, all the injustice, in the world.

St. Paul describes our condition after the first coming of Christ this way, in 1 Corinthians 13:12:

“At present, we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then [when Jesus comes again] face to face. At present, I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known.”

So it's hard for us to think of Jesus as a king, to think of him as our personal king, as king of the world, king of the universe. When we enter the church for Mass, are we consciously thinking that we are going to meet and worship our King?

Now let's look at what we know about the second coming of Christ, and compare that with his first coming.

In today's Gospel, Luke tells us that there will be dramatic signs on earth, strange developments with the sun, the moon and the stars and a pervasive sense of hopelessness in all the nations of the world. People will become so anxious about what is happening that they will die of fright. Chaos and confusion will reign. It will be a time of great tribulation.

It's at this time that Jesus will come again, in a cloud and with great glory. In his second coming, Jesus will come as what we might think of as a real king, with power, in glory, with trumpets blaring.

When Jesus comes the second time, all the confusion and chaos in the world will give way to complete order and clarity.

Every human on the face of the earth will then see the kingdom of God in all of its glory, in all of its truth and beauty. We will see the whole puzzle, not just some of the pieces.

St. Matthew, in his account of the second coming, adds something that is not in Luke's account. Matthew says that “all the tribes of the earth will mourn.”

But Luke says something similar. He says “For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth.”

The people will mourn, they will be assaulted, because they will see with the most intense clarity how in their lives they rejected the kingship of Christ. Some made an outright rejection of Christ's teachings. Other made big compromises. They wanted to be a little religious, perhaps, but also to be conventional, to go with the flow of the times. Maybe they figured that there was strength in numbers, that if their salvation was in jeopardy, at least they would have lots of company.

There will be some, we don't know how many, who will have somehow seen through the confusion, the chaos, of life on earth and perceived a vision of the kingdom on earth. They would have learned that Jesus had truly established a kingdom here in his first coming.

They would have experienced the divine, the supernatural life and grace that Jesus revealed to humanity, though he did so with parables, with teachings, with a life and a death which so many others found confusing and unattractive.

There are many ways to prepare to celebrate the **first** coming of Christ during this Christmas season. Here's what I'm going to focus on, and perhaps this might be something that would be helpful to some of you as well.

I want to spend this Advent focusing on Jesus as my King.

St. Paul says that no one can call Jesus his Lord and Master except by the Holy Spirit.

So I'm going to ask the Holy Spirit to help me acknowledge that Jesus is my king, that He's my Lord and my Master.

I want the Holy Spirit to help me to surrender to Jesus, to help me be a loyal subject of Jesus the King, to be faithful to Him and to accept His will for every aspect, every detail of my life.

Since Jesus gave the keys to the kingdom to the Church, I also want to be faithful and loyal to the Church.

My prayer this morning is that all of us, all of humanity, certainly all those who profess to be Christians, will see through the mystery, see through the confusion, see through the chaos, and surrender to the King, and become faithful and loyal subjects in His kingdom, and put all our hope in Him, before He comes again.