

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Nov 24th 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

It will be “Thanksgiving weekend” here in the United States beginning next Thursday, a/k/a as “Turkey Day”. That particular Thursday is a family-feast centered around a bountiful board. Relatives join together from great distances to give thanks. These greetings are verbal sometimes, but mainly showing up and relating and partaking are signs of knowing we have a home, a family where there is love, forgiveness, reunion, and of course, a wonderful meal.

It is a ritual celebration, usually the same traditional food, same relatives and friends, all trying to say thanks to each other for mainly, well, just belonging, for being wanted, for being around.

As we prepare for the Feast of Christ the King, where we will gather together in a Thanksgiving ritual, we can pray as well in the same spirit for our belonging to God's family and to each other in Christ. We can prepare by reflecting on ways God has labored to bring us to a fuller sense of creation, our creation. We can reach out and touch the little and large creations around us which support our life's experience.

The Eucharist is a Thanksgiving celebration, too, and like the celebration of this coming weekend, it does take preparation to more fully enjoy what we are doing. Sometimes it takes a meal to make a family just as it takes the celebration of the Eucharist to form a Church.

REFLECTION

In our First Reading for this celebration of the last Sunday in Ordinary Time, as well as the feast of Christ the King, we hear a short and historically important event. David was anointed king of Judah after the death of his father, Jesse. Judah was separate from Israel in territory and leaders.

The men of Israel, we hear today, come to David with a recognition of David as having been important in their history.

They announce that they would wish David to bridge the divide and distinctions between the two clans, the North and the South, and be the one king, under God, of Israel and Judah. David, later in the chapter from which this reading is taken, marches on to Jerusalem and captures the place of Israel's holy identity.

The Gospel centers our attention and prayer upon the life and death of a King who is defeated by the Romans and some of the Jews in that same city of Jerusalem. There is jeering and sneering and provocative, yet prophetic words hurled at this King. "He saved others let Him save Himself", have a bit of irony about them. He saved others and does so finally, by not saving his own self.

The Gospel ends with a three-way conversation among Jesus and two co-hangers-on. Luke's account of Jesus' ministry has a consistent theme of Jesus' offering himself and some "jeer and sneer" and others marvel and respond personally. So here we have the final offering and on one side is the scoffer and on the other side a receiver. The King on the Cross is as much an inviter as he was as he walked his whole life's road up toward Jerusalem. "Take Me and receive me", or "Take me and leave me" is the gesture of his life and love. This King invites a relational response within the context that his offerings and he himself, will be rejected.

The "elders" from Jerusalem come to invite David to be their king and in Jerusalem he proves kingship. The "elders" come to Jesus in Jerusalem to invite him to disappear. As these soldiers and rulers stand at the foot of his "regal" throne, they are safe in themselves. Their positions of power are secure. The Romans and the Jewish leaders, for separate reasons, are doing away with a threat to their security.

In contrast, we celebrate our recognition of how safe it is for us to stand at the same foot of his throne of the Cross. This King offers us safety from our own self-crucification. It is very difficult for us to condemn ourselves within the shadow of his throne. He is claiming us, blessing us from the "sign of the Cross" and with this blessing inviting us to receive all he is saying about us and to us from this wooden Throne.

We do not have to hear the words spoken to the "Good Thief" about being with him in paradise. If we prayerfully accept this final gesture of our being forgiven and blest, then all that we desire has been proclaimed from the Cross by the "New David", the new victor and it is our response that determines how we see ourselves. Are we slaves to a tyrant-king within ourselves shouting out "Shame! Not enough, do more! Have more!" over our shivering souls? We have a King who invites, receives not our tremulous service, but opportunities to bless us from his throne that we might live these few days of

life as blessings.

“The Lord sits as King for ever. The Lord will bless His people with peace.”

Note: Fr. Larry’s down to earth, pastoral style has helped many around the world reflect upon the Sunday readings for many years. Our archives are blessed to preserve those reflections. We would like to thank him for his service. Thank you, Fr. Larry!

Larry Gillick, S.J.