

Commentary to the Last Sunday of the liturgical Year - A

Feast of Christ the King - Cycle A - Matthew 25:31-46

Final Examination:



How we have loved

A pastor tells of a parish having a mission. At the close, 100 people quit the parish. Why? Because the real Christ in His entirety was preached. While the Gospel is good news, the authentic Christ is not comfortable news. Enlisting with the real Jesus may be dangerous to health and life. What is it about the Christ that conjures up so many various and even opposing images? What is that quality that separates Him from the inscrutable Buddha or any of the Mount Olympus gods?

More significantly, which of these many images is the authentic Jesus? Will the real Jesus stand up so

we may know Him? (Hans Kuhn) Is the authentic Christ the beardless shepherd boy drawn on the catacomb walls in the early centuries? Or is He the middle-aged emperor found in magnificent mosaics on the ceilings of eastern cathedrals? Bear in mind the western Church today demotes Him to a king. Yet, He never claimed to be either emperor or king. (Kuhn) Is the genuine Jesus the word-picture of the 14th century William Langland, who says, "Jesus Christ of heaven, in the apparel of a poor man, pursues us always."?

Does He belong to the Renaissance Fra Angelico who wept each time he painted the Passion? Or is He the striking figure of the sixteenth century Raphael looking as though He never suffered from an upset stomach in His life? Or does He belong to Michelangelo who draws Him forever in torment? Does Altdorfer capture Him when He paints Him saying goodbye to His mother? He looks like someone leaving Nazareth for Cape Cod for a holiday and wondering whether He remembered to bring His credit card.

Or is the genuine Jesus, someone else wonders, the weak figure of the European schools of the nineteenth century or the saccharine Sacred Heart of the twentieth? Could it be the real Christ is drawn by Frederick Buechner when he describes Him as "the wizard of all wizards?" Which film catches His spirit best? Is it the lavish production of DeMille's "The King of Kings"? Or is it Scorsese's "Last Temptation of Christ?" Or is it Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" with all its blood?

What will the reigning picture of Him be in this century? The sheer genius of the Teacher is that there are almost as many pictures of Him as there are minds to work them up. Africans paint Him black. Caucasians white. Asians as yellow. They are all correct. He is the property of everyone. Paradoxically, though, no one is surprised that He remains His own Man. Here is an image of the Master popular with college students. Beneath the picture of a macho-looking Christ runs this message: "Jesus aka Christ wanted on charges of sedition, anarchy, vagrancy, and conspiring to overthrow the government.

Dresses poorly. Uses carpentry as cover. Has visionary ideas. Associates with working people, unemployed, and winos. Has variety of aliases: Prince of Peace, Son of Man, Light of the world, etc. Full beard and scars on hands and feet the results of injuries inflicted by angry mob led by respectable citizens and local authorities." A description such as the above was worked up as an alternative to the unattractive Christs given to Christian young by 20th century "artists." This faux Nazarene was typified by the plastic Jesus affixed by suction cup to the dashboards of cars in the last century. Not only was the statue plastic but somehow so also was Christ.

Many as a result rejected the Church but held on to their Christ. Their company would include world-class poets, artists, and philosophers. For example, the Jewish novelist Franz Kafka writes, "What shall we say of Christ? He is an abyss filled with life. We must close our eyes if we are not to fall into it." Intellectuals could not turn their backs on a Jesus who not only fed hungry people but also gave them food for their long journey home.

They admire a Man who instructed His followers that they must forgive not seven times but seventy times seven. They salute a Man who does not simply dictate. He educates, challenges, and invites. This is the Person we come here to salute today on the feast of Christ the King. Call Him anything you want - Christ the Sultan, Christ the President, Christ the Pharaoh. It is immaterial to Him. He remains the Son of God. The Acts of the Apostles tell us He turned history upside down by His resurrection. He remains a tornado to this day. But enough of this! Christ is a pleasure to be enjoyed daily by everyone and not a riddle to be understood by anyone.

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