

Solemnity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe

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Deacon Nick Thompson

Eldridge Cleaver, an American writer and political activist, who became an early leader of the Black Panther Party in his 1968 book, Soul On Ice wrote, 'There is no more neutrality in the world. You either have to be part of the solution, or you're going to be part of the problem.' Now Eldridge is nowhere near original in this idea. Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew says, 'Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.' The Gospel of Mark perhaps has this same statement in mind or more likely, Jesus said it more than once. Jesus in Mark says, 'Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.' The Book of Revelation expresses the same sentiment, 'Be either hot or cold but woe to you who are lukewarm.' With God neutrality is not an option.

So maybe you're asking yourself, 'What does the celebration of The Solemnity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe have to do with neutrality?' You see, there is an actual solution to all the world's problems and that solution has already been decided upon and is being implemented even as we speak by the Lord God himself. "Thus, says the Lord God, 'I myself will look after and tend my sheep.'" Today's celebration concludes the Church year by reflecting on the fundamental truths of Christianity. Those truths are that Jesus Christ came to restore spiritual life to mankind, to vanquish death and form mankind into a Kingdom for God the Father. This is made explicit in today's second reading, from the fifteenth chapter of St. Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians*. The resurrection of Jesus has restored the life that was lost by mankind. All who belong to Christ will be handed over to God the Father at the end of time. Now that being said, each of us is either blessed or cursed based on the corporal works of mercy we perform. Problems solved!

This Sunday is not just about salvation history. It is not just about events that happened in the past. Nor is it about people in other places. The Solemnity of Christ the King is about us, right here, right now as well as every human being who has ever or will ever live. If we do not have God in our lives, then our lives are futile, meaningless and dead. Without God we go through the motions secretly asking ourselves, "Why bother? Why bother with raising children? Why bother

with caring for others? Why bother with being good? Why bother with anything?” If we do not have God in our lives, we easily overlook His Presence reaching out to us in the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked and all those Jesus mentions in the Gospel reading. If we do not have God in our lives, we are part of the problems of the world.

The Presence of God protects us from going through the motions of life. The Presence of God gives us the ability to live each moment as an opportunity to grow closer to Him. The Presence of God within each of us leads us to be the solution to the world’s need. Last Thursday was Thanksgiving. Santa’s float was the last one in the Macy Thanksgiving Day Parade. The holidays are upon us. Without God, Thanksgiving is just a day for a big meal. Without God, Christmas is nothing more than a celebration of materialism. Decorations will be taken out of their storage boxes and the proper sentiments will be mustered up, but without God, Christmas is merely a day of empty sentiments. But with God in our lives, Christmas becomes an opportunity for us to draw into a deeper union with the Presence that gives value to all life.

St. Paul writes that those who belong to Christ will be formed into a kingdom that will be handed over to his God and Father. Every sovereignty, every authority and every power in the world will be destroyed. There will be no presidents nor prime ministers, no ayatollahs nor any form of prince. The only King who is eternal is Jesus Christ. The only kingdom that will remain is that of God the Father. And we are members of that Kingdom. Or, are we?

There in, lies the problem, that is the question put before us in the teaching on the sheep and the goats. Both sheep and goats were surprised to learn that the Son of Man appearing to them in His Glory, with majestic, bright lights, with angels all over the place, and with trumpets booming out like thunder, this same Son of Man, the Judge of the Living and the Dead, was present to them in the suffering and needy of the world. The sheep did not need to be told what to do. They cared for others, they embraced the corporal works of mercy, because that is what people who have God in their life do. They did what the deep presence of the Lord within them led them to do: they reached out to those who needed them. They cared for the body of Christ. The goats could not be concerned with anyone but themselves. They ignored the plight of others and missed the Presence of God.

If we are serious about our Christianity, if we are committed to the Kingdom of God, then we will be living lives of sacrificial love, the love of Jesus Christ. Out of love for Christ, we will have no choice but to reach out to the suffering of the world. In this way, we will recognize the

Presence of God in those who might not even recognize His Presence in themselves. But if we are wrapped up in selfishness, if our lives are about “taking care of number one,” then we will miss our opportunity to serve God in others.

We are either part of the solution, or we are part of the problem. The true members of the Kingdom live their Christianity in a way that restores the world to the Lord, brings heaven to earth. Those who are wrapped up in themselves, not only miss the opportunity to care for others, but they live their lives in a way that adds to the plight of the suffering. Are we members of the Kingdom or not? Are we part of the solution or part of the problem? Acts of charity are not just nice things to do. They are not add-ons to our faith. According to Jesus: Our charity to others is fundamental to our faith.

During the last twelve month's we have followed the life of Jesus from the prophecies of Advent, through his birth, mission, death and resurrection. We have prayed over the message of His life as well as His teachings. Now, at the conclusion to the liturgical year we beg Him to help us recognize Him in our world and to acknowledge His presence in others. We seek the mercy of His continual grace drawing us out of ourselves. This solemn feast calls us to be part of the solution and it warns us that if we are not part of the solution to the world's deepest needs, we are part of the world's problems. There is no middle road.