

Dear Saints who share an inheritance in the kingdom of the Son,

Were you a bit caught off guard when you heard the Gospel lesson for today? Here we are on the last Sunday of the Church Year, Christ the King Sunday. We are supposed to celebrating the exalted Christ in all his power and majesty and splendor. On this day we look forward to the day when every knee in heaven and on earth will bow before Jesus the king, whether they want to or not, and they will confess that he is Lord.

So maybe it was a bit confusing to have before you a much different scene. People standing and jeering a man, seemingly powerless because he had been nailed to a cross. A sign hung above him that read, "This is the King of the Jews," and so all the onlookers taunted him to save himself, if he truly was a king. We hear the account of Jesus on the cross and we can't help but think, "What kind of king is this? Here he is dying at the hands of men! He seems like no king at all." Maybe those chief priests were right? It seems like the sign should have said, "This man claims to be the king of the Jews."

Today our portion from Paul's letter to the Colossians puts that crucifixion scene into perspective and shows us just exactly what **kind of king this really is. He's the king of creation, and he's the king of sacrifice.**

That crucifixion scene puzzles us so much because we have plenty of our own ideas about what being a king should mean. A king should be valiant and handsome, charming and brave. Everyone should know who he is the second he walks in the room.

Is there any one of you that never day-dreamed about being the king or queen of the world? Maybe since the latest live-action reboot of the Lion King, you have kids or grandkids that prance around the house like little lion cubs singing prince Simba's catchy song, "Oh, I just can't wait to be king!" His definition of being a king makes a lot of sense to us. "No one sayin', 'do this!' No one saying, 'Be there!' No one saying, 'Stop that!' No one saying, 'See here!' Free to run around all day. Free to do it all my way. Oh, I just can't wait to be king!"

That's the kind of king we'd like to be if it were up to us, with unlimited power to do whatever we want. That's the kind of kingdom where we're king and we think that will make us happy.

So just like little Simba, the thought of being king goes to our head and we go running off the first chance we get to the dark scary elephant graveyard. We know we're not supposed to be there, but we think, "We made it, this is so cool!" "I welcome the wild-side. I laugh in the face of danger!" How did that turn out for little Simba? He found himself standing in the middle of a pack of ravenous hyenas waiting to rip him to shreds.

How does the story go for us? The Bible tells us, **“Once you were alienated from God...because of your evil behavior”** (Col. 1:21) You and I rebelled against the true king of the world and ran off to become our own king, to do whatever we want. Hear the little king voice roaring inside us, “I am king and I will rule over my family with an iron fist. They will serve me as I sit on my throne watching football, and I shall not stand to be disturbed.” What about the roar of the queen? “I shall have nothing but the best that the river of Amazon prime can offer me, and my kingdom will abound with limitless treasure.”

Don’t get me wrong, watching football and ordering on Amazon are perfectly fine things to do. But there are certainly times where we use innocent things like that to dethrone God and set ourselves up as king. Where does that mighty mutiny land us? Neck-deep in the dominion of darkness, with no way out! The roaring lion, the devil stands over us with his pack of evil angels, licking his chops and waiting to devour us! There, when our little stunt is up, we finally realize, “We’re not king!” “We’re dead meat!”

So when we realize that we wouldn’t make for any kind of king at all, then maybe we better go back and take a better look at the king we had to begin with. We’re told, **“He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God.”** How can he be an image of something that is invisible? Because he took on a human body just like us. He is **“the firstborn over all creation.”** Jesus was with God from eternity, there was no time when he was not, and yet we also call him the Son, who was begotten of the Father in eternity, the firstborn over all creation.

“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (Col. 1:16). John’s Gospel tells us the same thing, **“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made”** (John 1:3) This king was not just some spoiled brat who inherited his kingdom from his Father, he was there at the beginning to build it. It was built by him and for him.

“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). A lot of people will tell you to look at the world and tell them how anyone, say God for instance, could possibly be ruling and governing it with everything that is going on. There’s natural disasters that kill thousands and there’s war that kills millions. There scandal and crime and terrorism and poverty and racial tension. So they come to this conclusion, “If someone is ruling this world, whoever it is, is doing a terrible job.”

Yet the truth behind it all is that this King does hold everything together, in spite of all the rebelliousness of his subjects. It may look like chaos and anarchy in his kingdom, but that’s only because he’s gracious enough to give us time to learn about him and come back to him, rather than just wiping us off the face of the earth.

When we look at the king of creation, we struggle to comprehend what is so far above our paygrade, and so we come to the same conclusion, “What kind of king is this? He can’t be our king!” That’s exactly what God’s people did to him in the Old Testament. They rejected him, and instead asked for a human king to rule them like all the other nations of the world. And so, for a time, God gave them what they wished for. He gave them a king, and to start with, life was pretty good under King David and Solomon. Then came a string of king after king, some of the most godless and rebellious men recorded in the Bible. The people wanted sinful men to govern them instead of God and they got what they begged for!

But God was gracious again. He accounted for this from the beginning and designed it so that he would once again be his people’s king. He promised a king through his prophets, and then he delivered one. **“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,”** his Son, the firstborn of creation, who was now going to be born into this creation as a true human. With no pomp or circumstance, only a manger for a bed, we look at the birth of the long foretold king and we say again, “What kind of king is this?” But this was the way the Father would bring his people back to the Son, their true and rightful king. The **king of creation**, for whom everything was created, set it all aside and became the **king of sacrifice**.

Not only does he step down from his throne in heaven to come to this earth, but he comes as the lowliest of men, with no beauty or majesty to attract us to him. The king comes not to give orders and dole out punishments, not to be served, instead he comes to serve, to reconcile his people to himself and his father. Now when we look at again at that crucifixion scene, the King of the Jews hanging on the cross, we realize **what kind of king this really is**. Sure, kings make peace treaties, but only the king of sacrifice does it by **“making peace through his own blood, shed on the cross” (Col. 1:20)**

He certainly doesn’t look like the king we asked for or expected, handsome and valiant, but he’s the king we always needed. He’s the king the Father sent after us to save us from the devil, the roaring lion, and his pack of demons. **“For God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves” (Col. 1:13). What kind of king is this? What kind of king** exchanges his own life for his subject’s? But that’s exactly what he does! This is the king who offers his own life to buy his captive servants back. **This is the king of sacrifice, the king of love**, and we get to live as brothers and sisters in his kingdom. **“In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13).** What kind of king is this? **What a kind king he truly is**, who gave up everything to have his people back safe with him in his kingdom.

That’s no king to be embarrassed about. That’s a king to adore above all things. And, his crucifixion is not the last time this king is heard from. If it were, the scoffers would be right. He

really couldn't save himself and he'd be just another dethroned king. But this king went where no king has ever gone before and lived to tell the tale. He went to his death, and then came back, victorious, the firstborn from the dead. This king conquered death itself.

So now in all things he is supreme, the king of creation, once again reigning at the Father's right hand in the kingdom of light. He's the king of life who triumphed over death. He's the king who graciously rules in our hearts once more, as he reconciled us with his own blood. Just as surely as the disciples felt the nail marks in his risen body, he's the king, radiant and glorious, who will come back on the last day, and you can be sure everyone will know when he walks in the room. The head will not rise and leave his members dead (CW Hymn 167 v.2), he will return to bring his body, the Church of all believers in Christ, safely to his glorious kingdom at last. **What a kind king this is, the king of creation, the king of sacrifice, the king of love!** Lord, your kingdom come! Amen!