

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ (2016)

November 20—It is the final and crowning feast of the liturgical year. The Solemnity of Christ the King brings us the great news of the victory of the crucified Lord over sin and death.

For many years, it was the day that the Knights of Columbus from throughout the Diocese would gather at the Cathedral and in their 4th Degree regalia process into the church to highlight their supreme devotion to the King of the Universe. It was our duty as seminarians to serve Masses at which a Bishop presided. At this particular Mass, as a college student, I was to walk a few steps behind Bishop (Kenneth) Angell, our Auxiliary Bishop, and hold his crosier when he was not using it. As we slowly processed up the aisle with full orchestra, choir, and a full volume pipe organ playing “To Jesus Christ Our Sovereign King,” a little boy, wide-eyed and focused on Bishop Angell, leaned out of his pew to get a closer look. When the Bishop Angell saw the boy, he stopped and extended his hand and said, “Son, do you know who I am?” The youngster, more wide-eyed than ever said in big voice, “Yes, you are the king!”

At that, Bishop Angell, with a smile, turned to us and said, “Now you boys should remember that!”

I think we can all agree, that a Cathedral celebration with all that

splendor is a good fit for this great feast yet, today, we are presented with this Gospel [Luke 23:35-42] and stare with reverence at that cross of Calvary, to meditate on the news that not only shocked a nation and a world, but literally changed the course of human history. Our Blessed Lord, the roaming rabbi of Nazareth who spent His life in the kind service of others. The Word of God made flesh, ever powerful yet ever humble, would silently stretch out His arms on the wood of that cross, and with love beyond description, bow His head in death for us.

Not only Jesus Christ, King of the Jews, as Pilate wrote in lasting epitaph, but Jesus Christ, King of Kings, because of **who** He was, and because of **what** He did for you and for me.

Holy Mother Church, in her infinite wisdom, mingles the festive notion of Kingship, with the painful image of that darkened Calvary night, to tell us that before we unfurl the banners, before we sound the trumpet, before we invite the guests, and before we proclaim the moment, we must understand clearly, that **this** Kingdom—**His** kingdom—is not of this world. And, if we deem ourselves ready to be His subjects and follow Him, then we must be ready to stand for the Truth to live His Message and to suffer as He did. All the while assuring us that even if death would swallow us He would hold fast to His promise and by **His** death rescue us.

My friends, there is no shortage of events in our lives that bring suffering into our path. Whether it is a family or marriage in turmoil, a job that is painful with disappointment each day, or a loved one or friend gripped with illness we walk through life, all the while being handed crosses that can weigh us down, test our faith, and challenge us to our very core.

But God, in His love and wisdom, left His heavenly home to state with clarity the eternal truth. He did this not only with words but by His very life blood, showing that suffering disappointment and even death would not conquer for if we are His then His victory will be ours.

There is a story reminiscent of former and fearful days when Julian the Apostate sat on Caesar's throne. A former Christian now serving as Emperor, he had taken to persecuting the Church and putting its members to death. One particular day he disguised himself so the crowds would not recognize him and slipped into one of the many pagan temples he had constructed. There he witnessed thousands crowding in to worship the gods he had fashioned to his liking. While watching the crowds, he recognized an old Christian friend named Agathon. And Emperor Julian pointed to the buzzing crowds and sneering at his friend asked, "Agathon, whatever happened to that carpenter of Galilee? Does he have any jobs these days?"

To which Agathon quietly answered: "He certainly does. He is building

a coffin for you and for the entire pagan Roman Empire.”

Six months later, as Emperor Julian lay dying, he issued the order to cease all persecutions, and uttered his last and most famous words: “O Galilean, thou hast conquered.”

My friends, He certainly does, then, now, and forever, and so we cry out with reverence and with love: Hail to Christ our King!

God love you.