

THE SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THE KING "A"
NOVEMBER 19/20, 2011

KING ARRIVES TODAY proclaimed the headline in the Decorah, Iowa *Journal* newspaper in October, 1975. At the time I was serving as the Associate Pastor at St. Benedict's Church and also as the chaplain to the Catholic student community at Luther College. I was pumped! For weeks the visit of His Majesty King Olav of Norway had been the buzz in town and on campus. This was no president or prime minister. This was the visit of royalty, a king! I found a place apart from the downtown route of the motorcade, and being allowed by a county sheriff's deputy who was a parishioner, stationed myself with him a short distance away from where most of the crowd had gathered. I wanted to get a good look at the king! Finally the motorcade approached (in those days dignitaries still rode in an open car). As the car neared I waved to His Majesty. But, he didn't look like a king! no crown, scepter, a be-medaled military uniform. Instead he wore an ordinary dark colored business suit and wore a formal homburg hat. He looked just like some of the local Norwegian citizens on a Sunday morning as they headed to church! I was disappointed. The king wasn't what I expected. But, still, he was the king.

The same dynamic is present in today's liturgy celebrating Jesus as King which brings the church year of seasons and feasts to its close.

The first part of today's gospel passage depicts Jesus very much as a king. We see him described as enthroned in glory, coming on the clouds of heaven with ministering angels, judging the nations. However, as in several of the parables from St. Matthew's Gospel from which have read this past year, there is a surprise. Christ is victorious; he is a king enthroned; he judges all the nations. The surprise is what I once heard described as the "Scandal of the Incarnation", the "Doctrine of Particularity of God."

Today's feast confronts us with the same challenge as the beginning of the church year, the Christmas mystery, God become our flesh in Jesus; the Jesus of history, born among and for us poor and homeless in a stable; who grew up in an out-of-the-way

backwater town in a country that was under the domination of the most powerful nation in the world of its day; who plied carpentry as his trade and eventually became an itinerant preacher whose words brought hope and comfort to many, but also caused alarm to the religious and political institutions of the day, so much so that they arrested and killed him. Following his death this same Jesus was, revealed and experienced by his first followers as raised from the dead, exalted by God as the Christ of faith, personally present to and in them and all who accept the invitation and risk of belief in him, in the unifying love and bond of unity between him and the Father, the Holy Spirit, who in turn, incorporates them into the inner life of God now, and fully after death, makes them members of the body of Christ as the church, a community of believers. This is our story.

Today's feast is the consolation and the challenge, then, to see and minister to Christ present in each other. It calls us to active love fully conscious that every human encounter is an encounter with God.

We *all* bear the presence of the Most High, no matter how diminished or disvalued we may seem. We are bodies of Christ. Spouses, children, neighbors, as well as the starving, the unwanted old, the defenseless pre-born child, the prisoner sitting in jail, the immigrant, the enemy, all those we are tempted, or in fact label, as “not one of us” because of religion, race, sexual orientation, or any other “reason”—they, no less than us—are him. Every reception of Holy Communion reaffirms this truth: Christ assumes our flesh as his own. As one of my seminary professors put the challenge to us: “Just as we genuflect in adoration and faith to the Christ in the bread and wine which in the Mass become His Body and Blood present in the Blessed Sacrament, so we are called to genuflect in faith and service to the same Christ present in every human being.” What if in our thinking, our praying, our acting, our political domestic and foreign policy, our economic decisions, we accepted Jesus' words, “Whatsoever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to me” as real, as true, literally true? What kind of world, country, state, city, parish, homes would we have?

Are we ready? **KING ARRIVES TODAY.**