

Once there was a priest who was known for his rather long homilies – so certainly, nobody you know. Usually the longer he talked – the more animated he got – swinging his arms, pounding the ambo, raising his voice. One Sunday he really got going and as he swung his arms -- he knocked all his preaching notes off the ambo. As he scrambled to pick them up – he asked – “now where was I??”

And a voice from the pews cried out --- “right at the end. . .”

Well, here we are – not at the end of the homily – but right at the end of the liturgical year: which is always the Feast of Christ the King.

Our readings today give us three images of a KING – which we are supposed to apply to Jesus -- two of the three being images we don't usually associate with a powerful person.

The first image comes from the Prophet Ezekiel – and this is an image of a CARING KING.

It's not *usual* for us in the modern world to think of kings and heads of state in such a caring role. Most world leaders today are wholly inaccessible to us – existing behind many layers of security and staff. Even some bishops, and maybe even some pastors – are hard to reach sometime. . . But Jesus, our king, is a caring king: the lost he seeks out, the stray he brings back, the injured he binds up, the sick he heals.

Of course Jesus applies this very image to himself when he says that he is the Good Shepherd – he looks after and tends his sheep.

Jesus, our king, is not a distant king – but one who care intimately about us.

The Reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians – gives us the second image of a King that we are rather used to: a CONQUERING KING. A king of victory. Paul says of Jesus: “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet – when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and every power. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Everything is subjected to him.”

One by one, God is putting all His enemies under Christ's feet. At times it might look like the ways of the world are winning out – but all things someday will be one – and God shall reign. One day even death itself will be destroyed.

The ultimate message of the Cross, and instrument of torture -- is that God conquers – not by brutality and cruel strength – but by love and by things such as forgiveness and mercy – things the world dismisses as weak.

And Christ, unlike worldly kings, does not force us to be His subjects and live in his kingdom. Earthly kings conquer regions and force peoples under their rule and might. But Jesus is a king who respects our freedom to decide whether to have Him as our King and to accept the virtues of His kingdom, *or not*. This king, though he is all powerful – does not force his kingship nor his ways. >> He offers them to all – and each of us must decide who, or what, will rule our lives.

Yes, Jesus our king – is a conquering king.

The third image is again, one we would not normally associate with a powerful person. This is the image not of a showy or a pompous king --- but of a CONCEALED or HIDDEN KING.

The Gospel teaches us that Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead – so we have to be watchful and ready – much like bridesmaids waiting for the arrival of the groom. . . or servants the return of their master. . . And in our watching and waiting – and in Christ's coming --- we discover that we have known him all along. . . As Christ comes and takes His seat on the throne – and all are summoned to him – we are going to have a strange sense that we've met him before. And he will confirm this feeling that we have. . For indeed, we have met our lord and majesty -- and he is the strangest king of all. . . For He is a king who is hungry, thirsty, sick, lonely, a foreigner, in prison, and a stranger. . . And the list he gives should not be seen as exhaustive – for he is in the needy, whether rich or poor. He is in the discouraged loved one who cannot find a job; he is in our children who need to be taught and encouraged; he is in the co-worker who just lost his wife; he is in the neighbor who was just diagnosed with cancer. He is in the lost members of our family who were shunned at Thanksgiving . . . and he is in you and me – in our struggles and needs.

Yes, we have met our king – every day. And he is merely saying that these people – whether we know their names or not --- have a real connection to him. . He is saying – they are him ----- and when we cared for them, we were not simply doing something nice – we were serving and caring for him --- **YOU DID IT FOR ME!**

What a strange king! We are used to thinking of kings in palaces, far removed from us, and far removed from any need. But this king is naked, poor, hungry, and thirsty. We see him every day.

And to those who have cared for him in his need, he says, “I will never forget what you have done.” The poor may not be able to repay us – but Jesus, our King – will repay us. As we stand before his throne, and we see him face to face, we will be able to say: “I know you! I recognize you!” And he will say to us, “I know you too. . . come inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Yes, Jesus our king, is the strangest king we will ever meet: a caring and close king, a conquering king who never uses force, a king who is hungry and thirsty, a king who reigns from the Cross, a king who dies so we don't have to, a king who washes our feet, a king who comes to serve rather than to be served.

Jesus is a king who rules with love, not by force. He is the strangest king we will ever meet – and he meets us every day: in the Eucharist, in the poor, in his Word, in our hearts, in the events of our day – even in our very selves.