Priest, Prophet, And King
Christ The King 2017

Refection By: Deacon Paul V. Hursh

In several places within the Christian Scriptures, we read about the people wanting to make Jesus a king. The most obvious time was when he rode into Jerusalem just before the Passover; it is what we celebrate as Palm Sunday. (Matthew 21: 1-11) Earlier we find that his own disciples expected him to be king. We learn this when James and John were jockeying for seats at his right and left when he came into his power as sovereign. (Mark 10: 35-45) What was Jesus’ response to those who would make him king? He fled from them and retreated to the mountains to be alone. (John 6:15) But, why did the Creator of the Universe refuse to take his rightful place as king?

I believe it was because Jesus knew their motivation and he knew it was not in alignment with his Father’s plan. In the 1st Century, the Jewish people were a subjugated people who lived...
under the yoke of Rome as well as being under the thumb of their own religious leaders who had been co-opted by their Roman overlords. These rulers, both religious and secular, were like the King and leaders of Israel that Ezekiel prophesied against when he wrote, “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been pasturing themselves!” “Should not shepherds pasture the flock?” “So they were scattered for lack of a shepherd…” (Ezekiel 34: 2, 5) Poor leadership caused what poor leadership always does; it caused a fracturing of the Jews into various groups. This is also true today.

Some of the major groups in the 1st Century were the Pharisees, the Sadducees, Scribes, the Sanhedrin, and the Herodians, and finally the Zealots. Perhaps one of these groups, the Zealots, pursued Jesus in order to enlist him as their charismatic leader. The Zealots were one of several different "revolutionary" groups in the 1st century who opposed the Roman occupation of Israel. One of Jesus’ early followers, "Simon the Zealot" (Luke 6:15) Simon (Not to be confused with Simon Peter) was a member of this group. Though he may have belonged to this revolutionary group before joining Jesus, more likely was “zealous” in the older sense or became non-violent under the influence of Jesus.

Those that followed John the Baptist were another splinter group within the larger Jewish community. With John’s death, they joined with Jesus’ disciples because of his charismatic leadership and the miracles he worked. So as we hear in Ezekiel today, God promises to “deliver them from every place where they were scattered on the day of dark clouds.” (Ezekiel 34: 12) Jesus’ healing ministry speaks of his priestly role in announcing the Reign of God where those who were scattered will be gathered together. As Jesus said, “I came so that they may all be one.”(More on this later.) Those who had followed the prophet, John, came to understand that he was only the one who was to prepare the way for an even greater prophet, Jesus. Jesus prophetic mission was much larger than the limited view of the nationalistic revolutionary party of Zealots who opposed the Roman occupation. Their influence persisted even after the crucifixion of Jesus, and in the year 66 AD, the Jews of Judea rebelled against their Roman masters. This culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD – an event predicted by Jesus.

As we learn in the scriptures Jesus the Nazarene is believed by some to be the King of the Jews (Thus the inscription on his cross – INRI). What was not widely known was that his kingdom was not a temporal one or one that would exercise power by way of domination. Jesus' kingdom was to announce the good news of his Father’s love as signaled by his priestly ministry of healing. Specifically, “the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hears, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.” (Matthew 11: 4-5) Both the religious authorities and Rome denied his authority and believed only that Jesus was a threat to their power and so they collaborated to put him to death. They didn’t realize that the one they opposed had a power greater than they could even imagine – He had power over death!

Like Jesus, we are also called to be Priest, Prophet, and King. When we are baptized we are baptized Priest (symbolized by the white garment), Prophet (…lighted candle) and King (…Anointed with Chrism), and as such are called to perform the same ministry that Jesus performed during his time on earth. This is the point of the Parable of the Last Judgment that we hear this weekend in the Gospel of Matthew. We are called to continue in the ministry of Jesus by declaring the Kingdom of God so that we can join with Jesus at the end of time in the kingdom that is already, but not yet.
We declare this kingdom to the world and take on our priestly role when we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the ill, and visit those in prison. For some, you will be prophets when you speak truth to power and be a voice for those who do not have a voice. Some are called to leadership roles as elected officials. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave.” (Matthew 20: 25-27) Elected officials put others first by enacting just laws that protect the rights of the poor, the sick, the elderly, the unborn, and alien among us.

Keep in mind that how we care for the least of our brothers and sisters is the basis of how we will spend eternity. The choice is ours, will we live our lives for ourselves, or will we live our lives for others.