

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski

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While I definitely do NOT have as passionate an interest in the cinema as Fr. Ken Riley, I do enjoy a good movie now and then. Among my favorite actors, comedians and filmmakers is Mel Brooks. I enjoy his satires and parodies because he oftentimes uses comedy to show us the absurdity and narrow-mindedness of many negative human behaviors, such as prejudice, bigotry and racism; he makes us laugh at ourselves.

I recall a Mel Brooks movie in which the French King Louis XVI, who was the last absolute monarch before the French Revolution, utters the tag line, "It's good to be King!" While it's ridiculous for any of us to realistically think we have such power, the power of an absolute monarch; upon reflection, I wonder how many times I've acted like a king; when I felt that the world revolved around me; when I had low regard for others; when I felt like I was the King of the Universe.

In today's scripture readings, we have two contrasting models of kingship. In the first reading, the people of Israel approach David, the shepherd—turned giant killer—turned great military leader who saved Israel from its enemies, and anoint him their king. The gospel reading, on the other hand, centers our attention upon the death, on the cross, of a king who is apparently defeated by the Romans and the Jewish leadership. The "rulers sneered at Jesus" taunting him to save himself, as he had saved others. The irony of this passage is that Jesus, God-made-man among us, actually saves us by NOT saving himself. Jesus is anointed king on the wood of the cross, a sign of paradox, of defeat yet final victory.

That's where the Solemnity we celebrate today comes into the picture.

This day, the last Sunday in Ordinary Time, the last Sunday of the liturgical year, provides us with the opportunity to acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, the King of the Universe, as professed by the "good thief." It affords us with the chance to recognize that we are actually very small and very powerless. Just recall the pictures of the small blue earth as relayed by Apollo 8 over 50 years ago or by the recently-launched Artemis I spacecraft, to obtain an idea of how truly insignificant we are in relation to the immensity of God's universe.

Once we accept the reality that we are not masters of the universe, rather that we are totally dependent upon the love and mercy of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who knows and loves us; then, and only then, can we be in a position to let our relationship with Jesus be renewed as a personal and intimate bond in which we are totally enveloped within God's loving embrace. Such intimacy with God fills us with gratitude of knowing how loved and saved we are, which bonds us even more closely to God, in mutual love. Such intimacy ultimately leads us to the desire for Holy Communion with Jesus, our King, in the Eucharist.

Acknowledging Jesus as our King also gives us courage and hope. With Jesus as our King, whom shall we fear? While the world is full of fearful realities—war in the Ukraine and elsewhere in the world, financial and economic struggles and political infighting, just to name a few—this Sunday, let ourselves be comforted. Have courage; we have a King and he is Jesus, whose mercy and love will always be with us; from which nothing can separate us.

With such courage, we are called to give hope to the hopeless, and proclaim the good news of the gospel by the way we love and show mercy, as a people who have nothing to fear for we have our King: Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.