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“He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God” (Luke 23:35).

Sunday, November 24, 2018: Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

2 Sam 5:1-3; Col 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43.

A recent PBS "Frontline" program revealed that when the president of the United States gives the State of the Union address to Congress, some 6,000 security people are involved in protecting the country's top leaders. This single example gives us a glimpse into what power looks like in today's world. As the POTUS arrives at the Punchbowl, code words for the president and the Capitol, all the trappings of office are arrayed around someone called "the most powerful man in the world."

Today's Solemnity presents Jesus, the most powerful Person in the Universe, in sharp contrast to all our ideas of earthly grandeur and importance. Luke and the other evangelists did not hesitate to apply titles to Jesus that were exclusive to the emperor in Rome, self-proclaimed as the "lord of the world and son of God." This deliberate subversion mocked imperial power that had ordered the execution of a hill country preacher in the remote province of Syria, a lowly carpenter who had dared preach justice for the poor and compassion for the weak.

After his crucifixion and death, the story of this man's heroic self-sacrifice was quietly being spread in Asia Minor, Greece and even in Rome, including the startling claim that he had been raised from the dead and proclaimed as the "Christ of God." In the coming centuries, as Rome crumbled and emperors fell under the weight of corruption and treachery, the name of Jesus was rising within history, shaping the ancient world and empowering an emerging Christendom in the Mediterranean basin and beyond.

Today's scripture readings affirm a much different model of greatness and power that emphasizes humility, servant leadership and self-sacrifice. This model inevitably critiques other images of power backed by force, of authority wielded to subdue and humiliate opponents, and of stature based on wealth and influence. Jesus was heir to King David's original call by God to be a shepherd for Israel. Jesus was a reconciler instead of a divider, a healer instead of a destroyer, a suffering servant sent by a merciful God to make peace, not by might but by the blood of his cross.

Even at the hour of his death on that bloody cross, Jesus reached out to a condemned thief and murderer to offer him a path to paradise. Luke indirectly proclaims the kind of power Jesus had by putting in the mouths of those who were scorning him, saying, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one." Proof that Jesus was God's chosen one was that he saved others by *not* saving himself. Rather, he was the seed that fell to the ground so that a hundredfold harvest of new life could spring up to transform history toward a different future.

If the real measure of true leadership is to put the common good ahead of personal and political survival, to seek the benefit of others instead of using every means of power to save oneself, then today's Word is a solemn and timely reminder of how God directs history with new heroes who speak the truth to power and remain faithful to principle even in the face of threats and obfuscation.

We celebrate Jesus today by imitating him and by supporting any movement toward restored dignity and humility in those who seek leadership in our nation, our church and our world.

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