


THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



November 20, 2022

KING

the seduction of power

by Drew Downs

About a century ago, the Roman Catholic Church named the last Sunday after Pentecost as Christ the King. Moved by the rise of both secularism and nationalism (a movement that would give rise to fascism), Pope Pious XI sought to celebrate the supremacy of Christ over the state as the church's response.

We arrive ninety-five years later with a newly-minted King of England and global fears of

rising nationalism and fascism. If there ever were a time to see Jesus's rightful place above the earthly powers, it certainly would be now.

As we read throughout the gospels of a Jesus who *avoids* and *rejects* the crowns humans would put upon his head, however, I question the impulse. The problem isn't one of hierarchy, but of power. And our own willingness to be seduced by it.

ORDINARY TIME

Autumn 2022

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

"Gathering gifts and gratitude"

Growing up in the church, things just went. I'd wake up Sunday morning, walk across the parking lot, and go to church (the benefits of living next door). People just showed up to read, sing in the choir, do all the church stuff. Then coffee hour just happened.

When I was old enough to acolyte, I did that for awhile. But it wasn't my thing. Which, I'll admit now, is pretty funny.

There's part of church that just *goes*. Or at least, it seems to go, as if by itself. And while we all know that it doesn't; that it requires real people; we also know that someone else always just...does it.

I spent a lot of years *going* to church. Until I found a church that needed everyone to participate in *something*. And then I realized that *any* church could be like *that*.

So much has changed in recent years. And we are being invited into a new era of practicing our faith. We cannot afford to pretend that our church is a machine and its people are cogs we can shove into it to keep it running. Nor can we only wait for handwritten invitations to serve. We are not here to preserve our institution or be passively served by it.

We're here to love and serve as beacons of Christ to our neighbors in this neighborhood. And I'm eager to see what each of us is truly capable of.

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

Autumn 2022

FOR SUNDAY

Last Sunday after Pentecost

November 20, 2022

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Luke 23:33-43

"One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!""

Reflection

We have come to the end of the liturgical year, known as the last week after the Epiphany. Next week, we begin a new year with Advent.

On this last week, we are given a strange final gospel story: Luke's depiction of the crucifixion of Jesus.

He has been tried, beaten, and marched to the hill. And then here, in his last conscious moments, he is mocked. Mocked by religious leaders and soldiers. Even one of the insurrectionists being crucified next to him.

This is a grim ending.

ORDINARY TIME

While we know the story doesn't end here, it really is a weird place for the church to leave us. Especially in the United States, where we'll turn from this to Thanksgiving preparation and getting in the holiday spirit.

As we wrap up our Christian calendar with this troubling story, perhaps we can notice what is not present in the story.

The most glaring absence in the story is remarked upon by the leaders and by one of the condemned: divine intervention. Either on the part of God stopping the evil hands of human beings or on the part of Jesus overwhelming the people with his own power.

Where they see absence as dispositive of Jesus's weakness, many more throughout history have seen the opposite. Or more precisely, the comparative weakness of the executioners and the commitment of Jesus to his part in the cosmic gambit.

I've always bristled at this moment. Not at the death (which is yet to come) or the torture that surrounds it (that's already unsettling), but at the neighbor's suggestion. He seems to be arguing that Jesus can only be powerful if he climbs down from the cross (and frees him, too!).

As if power begets using it.
As if restraint isn't an expression of power.

Rather than prove the power of God, it would prove Jesus a fraud. Another huckster offering a message of love to a cult willing to follow him into death.

The vision we are left with, of Jesus receiving the abuse of the powerful and the scorn of one of the condemned, is also of the masses weeping at the injustice. And me, looking at those seduced by power with eyes of pity and compassion. Because they really don't know what they are doing.

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