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Christ the King

Friends, today is one of my favorite feast days we get to celebrate on the church calendar, and the REASON I learned to love Christ the King was because of what I learned here at St. Christopher's when I was an intern a few years ago. It was here from this very pulpit that I learned why the message of these readings and of the feast is so important.

Now I say it was here that I learned about Christ the King because before that I didn't even know there was such a thing, feast days like this weren't particularly special in the churches where I grew up. But when I was here as the intern, the priest at the time, Eric Biddy, said it was a feast day created to fight Nazis. So I was sitting in the pews with images of Indiana Jones punching Nazis in Raiders of the Lost Ark in my head, I was like, man I am in.

Of course, I think he used that line to get people hooked and you know, it absolutely hooked me. But I think he really wanted to show that Christ the King and the readings that are part of this day remind us that there are a lot of earthly powers and rulers and causes which will fight for our attention and loyalty. But there is no one whom we are meant to call King but Christ. It's a good reminder still today, as applicable now as it was when this feast day was created in 1925.

You see, the notion that the Feast of Christ the King was instituted to fight Nazis wasn't exactly inaccurate. Pope Pius XI created the day just as Benito Mussolini created the fascist party. Mussolini ruled through the ideology of "All within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state." And in response Pius XI instituted a day to remind Christians round the world that the ruler to whom we

owe deference is not to be found in capitols and buildings of state but rather in the authority of Jesus Christ who calls us to love our neighbor.

Though it is of course a strange king we're called to follow. Our king is the man who was crucified with thieves, who was killed by the state which, like so many other governmental powers and rulers, believed itself the pinnacle of power. Instead of the king defined by coteries of royals and celebrities, our king was stripped bare and his clothes gambled over, who is mocked by the leaders and soldiers of Jerusalem, whose apparent kingship was ridiculed in that sign which read "King of the Jews." This emaciated man subject to the corporal punishment of the state... this our king.

We have plenty of images of power today we can turn to instead. We live in a world of celebrities and politicians, of swaths of successful people who profess powerful ideas, who seem like they know what they're doing and have the following of masses of people including us.

So why. Why do we celebrate the ridiculed king of the Jews. Why do we follow the man who hung to death on a tree?

I can't help but think of a moment that has stuck with me... which has helped me answer that question.

To believe that man who died on the cross is that king who sides with all who have suffered, who is identified with the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, and the oppressed. There was a young student I met in the fall of 2022. We were worshipping together and this young person offered up a word for God's presence with the people of Iran. Now I hadn't paid attention to what was going on in Iran at the time. My media diet was satiated with US politics. But a quick google search detailed the struggle for political freedom for which Iranian people had been protesting, protests sparked when the Iranian government's morality police seem to have killed Mahsa Amini, a 22-year old woman who was detained for not properly wearing a hijab. Since then, the government's response has killed somewhere in the neighborhood of 570 people. Just this past September, new protests have emerged, this being just a

year after Amini's death, these caused by the continued repression of that state of women's rights, their detaining of Amini's father and family, and the forbidding by the state of any public ceremony remembering and grieving Amini.

The reason I choose to call Christ King is because I cannot imagine him anywhere else but beside Amini and those who protested her death and the powers that caused it. Because I believe Jesus is beside those dying in Ukraine and Israel and Palestine, is beside those who've migrated here from the southern border seeking help as well as those who have been in our back yard around Oak Park since before you and I were born. I follow the king who died on the cross because while the world so often violently and arrogantly lords power, only one person has endured the depths of human hardship and suffering and injustice to emerge and remind all those who have suffered that they are the ones who are most cherished. That when we have been wracked with ruin and loss, Christ the king is beside us too.

It is Christ the King who stands beside you when you bear your own cross, who suffers beside you when you face the most difficult hardships of your life. When you face the powers of addiction, or loss of a relationship, or shame from friends or community, when you are alone Christ stands beside you. It is not in those places of power in the world where you'll find Christ the King, but when you weep, when you cry out, when things feel impossible and bleak. It is beside you in those moments is where Christ yearns to be. And promises that he will never leave you.

So this today we remember someone called king who has not like so many ruled for the sake of power. Instead, we look to someone who has always and will always give power away, who will always seek to empower those he loves and those in need. Amen.