

Monsignor Dennis Sheehan
Homily Given on November 22, 2008
The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe - Liturgical Year B

Remember the Magi, the Three Wise Men? “Where is he who has been born King of the Jews?” they asked. The question scared King Herod. He had a rival, a new king. To eliminate that rival, he slaughtered hundreds, maybe thousands.

“Are you the King of the Jews?” Pilate asks today. Are you King? Jesus is plainly guilty. He was a king. He is a king.

But – and this for us is crucial – he is not a king in Pilate’s sense. He has no interest in collecting taxes, in raising an army, in living in a palace.

He says that clearly: “My kingdom is not from this world.” Pay attention to that. He does not say, “My kingdom is in the other world.” He does say his kingdom comes from beyond this world. His kingdom is no less than the rule of God. It’s real. It’s here and now.

Jesus rules over human hearts. He won’t force anyone. He’ll invite them, persuade them. He won’t talk about defeating anyone. He’ll talk about loving and doing good to those who hate us.

Pilate didn’t get it. But then, neither did Jesus’ own disciples. Peter was there in the garden that night waving his sword. James and John wanted to sit in glory at Jesus’ right and left hand.

But Jesus would not be a king like Caesar. No map would mark the boundaries of his rule. But was his kingdom real? Well – look around you here today. All these people are part of Jesus’ kingdom. I’m part of it. You’re part of it. Yes, Jesus is a real king and his rule is very real.

Maybe the key to all this is in the word “power”. For Pilate, power is armies, force, fear, domination. For Jesus, power is compassion, self-sacrifice, and mercy. Pilate didn’t get that at all. But then sadly, Jesus’ own church hasn’t always understood that part either. No wonder it’s hard for you and me.

Maybe a story will help. A famous doctor with a large, lucrative practice surprised his colleagues and friends. He resigned all his affiliations, turned over his large practice. He went to Haiti, because, he said, it was the poorest place in the Western Hemisphere. A few years later, his pastor went for a visit. The doctor had just finished a very complex piece of surgery. “What would New York pay for that?” the pastor asked. “Oh, maybe two or three thousand dollars,” the doctor told him. “And here?” asked the pastor. “Oh,” said the doctor, “maybe a dollar or two – and the smile of God. But man,” he added. “This is living!”

“My kingdom is not from this world,” says Jesus today. We all know that. We’ve all seen glimpses of it. At the altar today we proclaim it, say amen to it. For the grace to live it, let us give thanks to the Lord our God.