

Last Sunday after Pentecost: Christ the King, Proper 29, Year B –  
November 24, 2024

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.*

When I was a sophomore in college, I went to a “No Nukes” concert in Battery Park. Two hundred thousand people sat on the ground between the World Trade Center and the Hudson River and sang along with Graham Nash, Carly Simon, Jackson Browne, and Pete Seeger. It was a gorgeous, sunny day, filled with peace.

On that sunny day in Battery Park, Jesse Colin Young sang, “Come on people now, smile on your brother. Everybody get together. Try to love one another right now.” Amen to that!

If someone had told me that twenty-two years later, two hijacked airplanes would fly into the World Trade Center and destroy the towers, I would not have believed them. That could not happen here. No way.

In last week's Gospel reading from Mark, like a small town kid looking up at the skyscraper for the first time, one of Jesus'

disciples said, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” Jesus replied that “no one stone would be left here on another, and all will be thrown down.” I wonder if the disciple believed him.

Jesus prophesied the events that would take place before the birth of the new kingdom. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes and famines. It’s not hard to envision what Jesus describes. It sounds like the world now, but Jesus cautioned that “This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.” He didn’t tell them when, but did tell them not to be fooled into believing that anyone knows when the end is coming.

Skyscrapers aren’t supposed to collapse. A concrete parking lot is not supposed to undulate, triggering car alarms and causing transformers to explode as they sway. Gulf waves aren’t supposed to surge into neighborhoods and sweep away cars and homes. Diseases aren’t supposed to kill a million Americans. Still, anyone who watched the World Trade Center collapse on TV, or who has experienced an earthquake, hurricane, or pandemic knows that these things can happen.

We feel a profound sense of loss—of loved ones and property, and also a loss of innocence that shakes us to our core. In time, each crisis fades and we find a new normal. We might avoid skyscrapers for a while, or move somewhere safer. Parishioners in my last church that was flooded by Hurricane Helene are moving to higher ground. This is a logical response in our earthly kingdom, but if Jesus were here, he would not tell the disciples to leave Jerusalem, or go back to their old lives and protect their loved ones. He set out a way for us to live so that we don't focus all our attention on avoiding or anticipating the next crisis. He taught us how to be disciples.

One person who lived this way was a Jesuit priest who became the Superior General of the Order of Jesus, the Jesuit order. Fr. Pedro Arrupe was working in Hiroshima, Japan, on the day the United States detonated an atomic bomb over the city. He described his first sight of the wounded, the result of the atomic bomb. "On and on they came, a steady procession numbering some 150,000. This gives some idea of the scene of horror that was Hiroshima. ... We did the only thing that could be done in the presence of such mass slaughter: we fell on our knees and prayed for guidance, as we were destitute of all human help."

Fr. Arrupe prayed for the victims, then he took action. He used the medical training he had finished before entering the Jesuits to care for the wounded. The Jesuits 'house became a makeshift hospital. Pedro Arrupe didn't run away from the devastation. He ran toward the devastation into the city to care for the victims, like the hundreds of police officers and firefighters who ran toward and into the Twin Towers on 9/11.

On this Stewardship Sunday, we offer up our promises to the Church, the Body of Christ, for the coming year. We resolve humbly as members of the church to continue Jesus 'ministry in the world. We pray that our church's basic needs will be met so we can focus on witnessing to the Gospel in a way that reflects our authentic lives in Christ. One of our members rescues abandoned pets. Another has for many years, faithfully visited prisoners by writing letters. How are the rest of you being disciples "out of doors," as Pedro Arrive would say, in the world? Please come share your stories with me.

Since coming to you, my sermons have focused on Mark's Gospel, especially how Jesus prepared the disciples. We close our study of the disciples by observing the feast day of Christ the King. On this day, we are called to examine not only how we

serve, but how we use our authority. I am a Christian, a priest, a mother, daughter, sister, community member and citizen of a nation. As a priest, am I illuminating the Gospel in people's hearts and minds so they may see and know God's kingdom? Am I welcoming them to the Lord's table so their spirits may be fed? Am I gathering the lost sheep into the fold? Am I continuing Jesus' ministry--caring for the poor and the sick and dying, feeding the hungry, visiting the imprisoned? As a family member, am I helping my loved ones to live their own authentic lives? As a community member, do I know my neighbors? I love and support those in need in my congregation, and how will I seek out those in need in the community? As a citizen, do I participate in our democratic process, amplifying the voices of people who have no power?

As we start the new church year and begin the season of Advent, a season of anticipation and hope, Christ the King Sunday points us in the right direction. If we seek out and find where true power lies, we will be bolstered from all that is to come. That true power lies in Christ the King who blessed the powerless, prayed for those who abused him, and never stopped forgiving and saving people.

Let us pray:

Lord, in these challenging days, it's hard sometimes to know the direction we need to go. When our needs are so great, it is hard to find even the will to serve.

But we praise you because we don't have to understand where to go; we need to follow you where you want to lead us. We surrender this church and everything in it back to you, and pray that you will give us a vision for the future of this ministry.

Give us eyes to see where you want us to go, give us ears to hear your guiding words, and provide us the courage to pursue it. Help us follow you and give us a vision for the future into which you are calling us.

Send us from this place with the Commissioning to do your work your way for your glory. We need your courage to pursue this mission. We need your strength to take on the challenges we face.

May our lives be transformed by your loving spirit, God, so your Kingdom will be near.

Amen.