



CATHEDRAL *of the* INCARNATION

Christ the King – Last Pentecost Year A ---November 26, 2017

Exita

The Rev'd Canon Bruce D. Griffith, Th.D.

For a little over four hundred years, this Sunday was known as *the Sunday next before Advent*, then briefly it was known as *Last Pentecost* (the title you will find in the Prayer Book calendar), finally with the coming of the Revised Common Lectionary it took on the current title, *Christ the King*. The collect in the Prayer Book (p. 236) anticipated this as you will find in your bulletin; it is certainly a worthy theme for the “end” of the Christian year, or for that matter most anytime in the Christian year. Yet it is more than nostalgia when I say that I deeply regret the loss of the collect on this day which now appears as the collect for the third Sunday in Advent. Somehow, in that position it loses its impact: “Stir up your power O Lord, and with great might come among us . . .” When Archbishop Cranmer placed this collect as that for the Sunday next before Advent, he had in front of him a 700-hundred-year-old Sacramentary (book of prayers for the masses of the year) which gave him three collects for Advent all of which began with the same word in Latin *excita* (*excito*, *excitare*). He chose to translate this single word by the doublet “Stir up”, and had he used all three of the prayers we might have had three weeks of praying for God’s being “stirred up”; for myself, and for our time, I would have used the transliteral “Excite your power, O Lord”, and moreover with that power excite us.

For my own part I am rather exhausted by the events of the last while. We try, not always successfully, in our house not to talk politics at the dinner table; it is too exhausting. The political and governmental life of the world, not just our nation, has come so to dominate our consciousness that we are becoming incapable of reading any situation, event, or idea in non-political terms. It doesn’t matter if it was Egypt last Friday, or Alabama last week, or North Korea last month, or Zimbabwe today, or Germany next week, and the list goes on, it is just exhausting. No wonder our entertainment industries have resorted to a

hodgepodge of militaristic, feudal or futuristic wargames replicas; it is escapism in regrettably known terms. It is all about victory and little or none about reconciliation. And just in case you think that this sort of thing does not infect the church directly, I tell you that one of the reasons I think the Feast of Christ the King should be quietly removed is that it has very little origin in our worshiping life, but much origin in a heated controversy between the Pope and Benito Mussolini.

But I cannot and will not let this exhaustion win, this despair triumph, and this pernicious and dangerous moment in world history determine its preferred outcome. At the worst moment in his life, Jesus turns from his agony, forgives a penitent thief, and entrusts his mother to another; when everything seems to be falling apart and the Israelites cast an idol while Moses is on the mountain, he comes back, sees to the idol's demise, and leads his people on towards the promised land; and so, the story of salvation goes, the triumph of God is realized as the hope of the world.

In such a massive and mighty endeavor, the petitioning of our God is surely to be found in these deeply moving encouragements of the letter to the people at Ephesus: "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you..."

Yes, the hope, pure unvarnished hope; no delusions, no denials of reality, no underplaying of the difficulties or the dangers, but hope grounded in the knowledge that God would not abandon the Israelites in the desert, the Hebrews in Babylon, the disciples on that terrible Friday night of loss. The depth of despair is not so deep as the height of love. That height can defeat the depth of despair if we will but let it; if we will but stand prayerfully resolute in the face of all this chaos and acknowledge that the Lord of the cross is the Lord of life who gives meaning and order to our future. God in Christ will enlighten us, grant us the hope that puts despair to flight, and fulfill that promise of Jesus's words in today's gospel, "Come you that are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..."

Would you want to be among those who are blessed of the Lord? Would you like despair overcome by hope? Would you like peace to reign, and this place, not only eternity, be the kingdom of Christ? Would you like to be excited by the exciting power of God stirred up in you and among us?

Well, we will be on our way when we can listen to today's gospel and recognize that it not a one to another one issue but an issue that transcends number. We will be on our way when right here on the ground we take with much greater seriousness the reality that the kingdom begins with those of whom it can be said that they fed the starving, gave drink to them that were dying of thirst, welcomed the strangers, clothed the naked, healed the sick and visited the imprisoned. It is no social or political agenda: it is a gospel imperative. It is, by the way, exciting work, fulfilling work, empowering work; "Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us"; we need you so that we can do our work, so that we will be remembered as the excited "blessed of the Lord".