



HOMILY OF THE MOST REV. DONALD BOLEN, ARCHBISHOP OF REGINA

**Solemnity of Christ the King
Sunday, 21 November 2021**

Today's Readings:

1st Reading: Daniel 7.13-14;

2nd Reading: Revelation 1.5-8;

Gospel: John 18.33b-37

Warm greetings in the Lord Jesus.

Over the next five weeks, I have been asked to share a few homiletic reflections to help prepare the church in Canada to accompany in solidarity and prayer the delegation of Indigenous Peoples to Rome to meet with Pope Francis 4 weeks from now. A number of people have helped to shape these reflections, for which I am grateful. In each reflection, as we move towards the birth of the Christ child, we will ponder what is being asked of us in seeking a new way to walk in solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples of this land.

Today is the feast of Christ the King. At the heart of this feast is a paradox about power and the exercise of power, and we hear it coming through in today's Gospel. Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?", and Jesus, in so many words, says not the kind of king you are thinking of - "My kingdom does not belong to this world.... I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Many of Jesus' disciples and hearers wanted him to come with political power, to overthrow the Romans, to exert authority over all who were oppressing the people.

But his way was not about 'power over'; it was about self-giving suffering love, a love willing to humbly serve, to wash the feet of others, to listen to and heal the wounds of the suffering. The paradox of today's feast is brought home when we think of Jesus on the cross with a sign posted above him, King of the Jews. Today's feast turns us towards Jesus' understanding of power, and that is an important entry point as we ponder the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the Catholic Church, historically and today.

There are limits to which it is appropriate to judge people of the past by our understanding today, but we need to acknowledge that it was deeply problematic that Christianity came to this land accompanying European powers with a particular view of this land and the Peoples who had lived here for tens of thousands of years. When rivaling Europeans came to what they termed the 'new world' and saw all this land, they erected crosses to stake and claim it for their respective monarchs. They came with assumptions of the superiority of their cultures.

While there could have been a rich encounter between cultures, languages, spiritualities and ways of living on the land, what largely resulted instead was domination of Indigenous Peoples. When we look today at ways in which the church gave moral authority to the colonizing enterprise, including power over Indigenous Peoples here and in other parts of the world, we are confronted with the reality that church leaders of that time allowed themselves to stand in solidarity with the dominating powers instead of with Indigenous Peoples.

Accompanying colonizing nations, often with the notion of conquering the world for Christ, seems to stand in sharp tension with Jesus's words in today's Gospel: my kingdom is not of this world. We heard just a few Sundays ago in Mark's Gospel Jesus reminding his disciples that while in the world those with power lord it over others, it was not to be so among his disciples. He reminds them that God's way is the way of a love that gives of itself, and that he came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life for us.

Good and healthy evangelization is not colonization. Rather, it comes with the humility of the God who comes to dwell among us, to pour himself out for us. It comes with a word to proclaim, with a healing and redeeming presence at the service of humanity, and with a desire to enter into dialogue with cultures. When Saint Pope John Paul visited this land in 1984, at the Martyrs Shrine in Ontario, he stated,

"Christ, in the members of his Body, is himself Indian... Through his Gospel Christ confirms the native peoples in their belief in God, their awareness of his presence, their ability to discover him in creation, their dependence on him, their desire to worship him, their sense of gratitude for the land, their responsible stewardship of the earth, their reverence for all his great works, their respect for their elders. The world needs these values and so many more that they possess."

That martyrs' shrine is a place where we are reminded of a missionary effort that was much closer to Jesus's way of exercising power. St. Jean de Brébeuf and companions sought to enculturate themselves fully with the Huron-Wendat people they came to serve, living with the people, learning their language and way of living on the land, helping with tasks as needed. He came to admire them, recognizing them as intelligent, welcoming, good businessmen, who had a profound sense of the spiritual. It was obvious to him that the Spirit of God was very active in their culture. At first he viewed some of their spiritual and cultural practices negatively, but his views shifted as his respect for the people grew. God loved Brébeuf's Indigenous friends and God was with them whether they were baptized or not.

Now is the time for us to commit ourselves to walking with Indigenous Peoples with the same commitment as St Jean de Brébeuf, seeking ways to hear their voices speaking their truths. As we celebrate this feast of Christ the King, let us remember that Christ's kingdom is one of deep listening and humble service. He said "I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice," and suggested that we would hear his voice calling to us in the voice of every person in need (Mt. 25:31-46).

Today he invites us as his disciples to face the past honestly, to acknowledge our failings, and to learn a new and non-colonial way of walking in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples. Our walking together in right relationship will find its way through encounters and experiences of deep listening, followed by concrete acts of justice that pave the way towards reconciliation.

The delegation to Rome is preparing the way for this kind of experience, as delegates will be sharing their truth and encountering Pope Francis in preparation for an historic pilgrimage of healing and reconciliation. Let us accompany the delegates with our prayers and our commitment to be a part of that walking together.