

HOMILY FOR FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING

One of my favorite films is “To Kill A Mockingbird”. The main character is the gentle and wise Atticus Finch – a quiet man who taught by example and not by words. Atticus Finch was a lawyer. The film centers on the trial of Tom Robinson who is charged with the rape of a young woman. Tom is black and the girl is white. Atticus Finch is asked to defend Tom. The issue is, of course, explosive.

Many of the town folk hate and despise Atticus for taking on Tom’s defense. Tom is innocent of the charge, and Atticus calmly and logically demonstrates how full of holes the woman’s story is. It doesn’t matter. The prejudiced southern jury finds Tom guilty. When the verdict is pronounced Tom is taken away.

The judge, the jury and the entire courtroom of white folks also leave. Atticus is alone in the courtroom – alone except for all the black folk who can only watch the proceedings from the balcony. They huddle together in a hushed silence. Among the blacks are Atticus’ two children. Atticus is oblivious to all these people watching him. He packs his briefcase and turns to walk out of the empty courtroom. As Atticus begins to walk down the aisle the Black Minister leads all the others in the balcony in standing. Atticus’ young children stay seated. The minister

turns to them and says: “Stand up. Your Daddy’s passing.” No king could ever have received such respect.

We often think of kings and queens as titled royalty who live in luxurious palaces. We think of names like Elizabeth, Charles, William and Catherine. We remember images of pageantry and royal weddings, of trumpets and massed choirs, of honor and prestige. In truth, however, one can be a king without wearing a crown.

On this feast of Christ the King we are given an image that is not very regal. It is the image of a man made humble before the prejudice and bigotry of others. It is the image of a man beaten and crowned, mocked and humiliated. It is the image of Christ before Pilate.

But while Pilate may wear a crown of temporal power, it is Christ who wins the day. For Christ knows that his kingdom is not about power and palaces. Rather the kingdom of God is about truth and freedom. The kingdom of Christ is about learning to live in the light of God’s eternal love. The kingdom of God is about doing the right because it is God who calls us to do the right.

Atticus Finch is one of countless human beings who teach us by example what it means to follow Christ the King. For to claim Christ as King means that our concern is not for pageantry and royalty but for the establishment of God’s justice in this world. To follow Christ the King

means that we are unafraid to stand against the prejudice and hatred that often infect our world and proclaim by what we do that God's love knows no favorites and embraces all of us.