

What Kind of King is This?

‡ Christ suffers in shame.

‡ Christ is crucified for glory.

In the name of Christ our King, dear fellow subjects:

From a human perspective nothing in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' arrest, trials and crucifixion makes sense, especially not in Matthew. This Gospel was primarily written for Jewish people, the same race as Jesus of Nazareth. How He could do so much good as a man, then suffer as such a criminal? It violates any standard of justice in any society. But then for His Jewish religious leaders to become so irritated that they finally had Jesus beaten, mocked and crucified, defies any sense of decency or sanity.

From a spiritual viewpoint, the same is true many times over. The Bible claims Jesus is God's Son, shows His power over sickness and death itself – then has Him executed between the most violent convicts? Even Jesus' own brothers asked earlier if He knew how to start a religion! (John 7:2-5)

This last Sunday of the Church Year, dedicated to CHRIST THE KING, begs us to ask, **What Kind of King is This?** But the dear Holy Spirit will not leave us in darkness. He gladly enlightens our minds and hearts with the nature of Christ's Kingship, His rule, His glory. Look and see.

‡ Christ suffers in shame.

One rabbi spoke for centuries of Jesus' fellow Jews when he said on the radio, "We do not need a Messiah who dies on a cross." The **shame** of this Messiah whom we worship as the Christ of God is undeniable. The strange part is that so few of His God-loved countrymen can see how God's prophets predicted the Messiah's **shame**. 700 years earlier, Isaiah the prophet had asked God a frustrating question about his fellow Jews: *"Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not....He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer...."* (Isaiah 53:1-10 *passim* NIV)

Many other Old Testament prophecies from the ancient Jewish Scriptures should have left no question for Jesus' disciples that the **Christ** would suffer **in shame**. Yet late in Jesus' ministry, when He began to tell them, His lead-disciple Peter reacted like us when troubles come into our lives. Peter demanded Jesus not talk like that. Jesus had to rebuke Peter and the other disciples repeatedly. But they failed to watch and pray, slept instead, and ran away when Jesus needed them most. And now Jesus has stood before the court of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, clearly admitting He is the King of the Jews. But the unimpressed mob was so violent, that Pilate finally washed his hands in front of them while they shouted, *"His blood be on us and on our children!"* (v.25)

All this is **shame, shame** and more **shame**. Likewise, what happened next in our text today. It was Roman custom to increase the **shame** for criminals to be crucified. But they screwed it down hard on Jesus. A scarlet cape, a reed in His hand, a crown of thorns were all meant to mock Him as a king. "Look at you, Jesus of Nazareth! If you are a king, take that and that." The spitting and the mockery and the blows with the reed from His hand were meant to dig deep into His soul and make the **shame** unbearable. They kept it up until too tired and bored. *"Then they led him away into the crucifixion"* (literal) with all its horrendous **shame** and bloody torment in a slow, agonizing death.

Few have tried as hard as Mel Gibson in his *Passion of the Christ* to portray the pain Jesus suffered. But the **shame** went far deeper than cameras can ever see. In fact, the darkness that descended on the land for three hours was the only friend this suffering Christ finally had. And the **shame** He felt was all the more intense because as proved by two Gentile and two Jewish courts, Jesus was innocent.

If you ever wondered whether you personally deserve God's eternal wrath in hell, look here and understand God's justice. **What Kind of King is This who suffers in shame?** We Christians want the media and the government to honor our faith since this nation was founded on Christian principles. The writings of our early presidents and the Ten Commandments that once stood rock solid in our courtrooms testify to the Judeo-Christian bedrock of American law. But the same Christ-crucified warned His disciples, *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first....He who hates me hates my Father as well....But this is to fulfill what is written in their [Jewish] Law: 'They hated me without reason.'"* (John 15:18,23,25 NIV) We listen, then we forget. As soon as someone slights us, we don't like them anymore. God does not command us to like, but to love as we've been loved and to forgive as we've been forgiven. Yet our angry quarrels, petty differences, and hyperactive memories testify to our failure to let Christ rule in our hearts. The world's honor is a crown of thorns – looks good from a distance, but cuts to the heart. And head wounds bleed profusely. Christ the King wants to rule in our hearts but our love for the world keeps getting in the way. The Lord's Apostle John wrote God's command and warning: *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* (1 John 2:15 NIV) Our sins were His **shame**. But look again at this **King**.

✠ Christ is crucified for glory.

All over these same verses we see **glory, glory** and more **glory** because Christ-crucified is also Christ-risen. That same 700-year-old prophecy from Isaiah 53 is filled with **glory** for **Christ** our **King**: Yes! *"It was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."* (Isaiah 53:10-12 NIV) Jesus is the only **Christ-crucified for glory**.

Let's be honest. If God were fair with us, if He gave us what we deserve for our sinfulness from conception to now – all the sinful thoughts, words and deeds committed, and the good thoughts, good words and good works omitted – each of us would have to suffer eternally in hell. Man's justice cannot keep up here. But neither can man's mercy. God's justice must be satisfied. And God's mercy found a way to do it. **Christ** our **King** is the One and only God-Man, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary as the Son of God and Son of Man. He lived under God's law, kept it perfectly in our place, then died an innocent death in our place. **Christ-crucified in glory** is raised by God as our **King**.

Imagine you're in a courtroom faced with fines, penalties and life sentences you can never pay. But the judge allows someone else to step up and pay everything you owe. Then after three days the Judge throws open the prison cell on your deliverer. He goes free, but so do you. By order of the Judge you're free! How will you ever repay the One who paid for your crimes? How can you ever say, "Thank-you!" enough that Christ died for you? Your **King** suffered **shame** to bring you to **glory**.

This is your life and mine in the kingdom of this **Christ**. We enter by our Baptism. God preserves and strengthens us by Word and sacrament for the rest of our life on earth until we see it all fulfilled in heaven's **glory**. What other creditor would tell the debtors, "Pay me back by loving your neighbor as yourself." He daily carries our guilt, our grief and the burden of our sins to give us peace. This **King** wants to rule in the hearts of everyone we know. The coming weeks give many opportunities to love and invite them to worship. "Thy kingdom come!" O Savior, Christ our Lord! Amen.

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