

Homily based on the readings from November 24, 2024 (Daniel 7.13-14; Revelation 1.5-8; John 18.33b-37)

It is quite natural, particularly in the wake of the recent elections, to become fixated on the current political situation. What will be the priorities of the incoming administration? Who will be selected to serve in the new cabinet? How will Congress and the courts respond to the shifting landscape? All of these questions are – to a certain degree – interesting and important. As *citizens*, we have an obligation to keep ourselves informed about what is going on in the world and to participate responsibly in the democratic process. Nevertheless, the *peril* that many of us face is the tendency to invest too much of ourselves in what is happening in Washington, or in Hartford, or even in our local cities and towns. The political system certainly *affects* all of us, but we must never allow it to *define* us.

One of the most alarming trends that I have observed over the past few weeks is the number of people – on television, on social media, in our

local community – who say it is acceptable, even praiseworthy, to shun friends and family members who voted differently from how they did. I do not mean to minimize the importance of supporting candidates and causes that align with our values, but we all have to approach this situation with basic *humility* and common *decency*. As fallible, sinful human beings, we have absolutely no right to cut people off because they do not live up to *our* standards, whatever those might be. We are not judged by how we treat the people with whom we naturally get along, but by how we interact with those who try our patience, or whom we find unpleasant, or who have made decisions with which we fundamentally disagree.

If we are being honest, we have to acknowledge that no party or platform is completely above reproach. The remarkable system we have all been blessed to inherit – *government of the people, by the people, for the people* – is only as good as the *people* themselves. If individuals are petty and vindictive, then the country will be as well. The best thing we can do for our nation is to embody the virtues we would like it to possess

– to embrace *the better angels of our nature*, as the saying goes. In the end, people are *rarely* convinced by lofty rhetoric – or even by well-reasoned arguments – but are frequently moved by acts of kindness, generosity, and compassion.

Although we must do whatever we can to support the institutions of our *republic*, we must always remember that our *true* loyalty lies elsewhere – to a *Kingdom* and to a *King*. This *King* provides a model that is radically different from that of any earthly ruler. When Christ tells Pontius Pilate that his “kingdom does not belong to this world,” he does not simply mean that he reigns in Heaven. What he is saying is that his *authority* does not come from arms or from armies; that his *mandate* does not result from inheriting a throne or from winning an election.

The paradox of Christ’s power is that it is embedded in self-sacrifice. Even though he could have batted Pilate away with a flick of his finger, he allowed himself to be *judged* and *executed* by an authority that was infinitely inferior to himself. *God himself* took human form so that he

could be *tortured* and *murdered* for our salvation. This is not the behavior of an earthly lord, but the Kingship of the Cross.

This conception of authority does not just apply to Christ himself, but to his followers as well. As he told his apostles:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20.25-28)

Each of us, in our own way, is called to wear the Crown of Thorns – to *imitate* the kingly suffering of Christ. That does not necessarily mean enduring pain or discomfort for its own sake, but living our *lives* in radical service to others. We must feed the hungry – not just when we have enough for ourselves, but when we ourselves are going hungry.

We must give others *drink* when we ourselves are thirsty, provide *comfort* when we ourselves are in pain. In the political arena, we must view our victories as opportunities for *self-giving* and our setbacks as invitations to *humility*. We must *always* remember that any contributions we make are *miniscule* compared to the sacrifice of Christ. He gave himself as a meal for us; we are simply returning the table scraps.

At the time of the American Revolution, one of the most popular rallying cries across the Thirteen Colonies was that “we have no king but Jesus.” Although this slogan was certainly intended to undermine the authority of the British monarch, it also serves as a vivid reminder of our relationship to the powers of this world. Even though we are all subject to a president, a governor, and even a mayor or first selectman, the only sovereign to whom we owe our *full* allegiance is Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the eternal and triumphant *King* of the *Universe*. “His dominion is an everlasting dominion ... his kingship *shall* not be destroyed.”