

For all of us there are passages, for individuals and families for communities and organizations, for all of us there are different stages of development. Those passages and stages of development are the natural by-products of life and growth. Normally what happens is that we get ourselves settled into a certain stage of development, and after a period of adjustment and re-orientation, things start to feel pretty good. The new shoes don't pinch anymore, the landscape around us doesn't look alien any longer, the things that felt so strange at first begin to feel normal, and so we settle in for the long haul. You could call it snuggling into the velvet rut.

But then, just about the time we've decided that there just might be a stable-state after all, something happens to push or prod or catapult us out of the velvet rut through a passage and into a new stage of development — and notice I said, "something happens."

Very, very few of us will pick up and move on our own volition. Most of us go kicking and screaming and resisting in every way we can, and there's a good reason for that. It's not just that we don't like change, though that's certainly true for most of us. It's because moving through these passages and into a new stage of development is hard work. It's a time that almost always involves stress and turmoil and a sense of dis-orientation, and it can feel like a time of crisis. It's a time when everything is thrown open for renegotiation — ways of thinking, patterns of behavior, values — everything has to be re-evaluated. That's hard work, especially for people who are resistant to change. It can be such an unsettling process that many of us will do almost anything we can to avoid it. We'll do almost anything to maintain the status quo and stay snuggled into our velvet rut.

But of course, for anything that is alive there is no status quo, and so we are propelled through the passage and into a new stage of development — and it's a time that can involve some anxiety and a lot of hard work.

In any group or community there are always some people who just aren't up to the task. Transition and change in a group or community are always accompanied by the temporary departure of some

members. That's a normal, natural thing, but when some people start to go away the doubts and anxiety felt by the ones who remain are only increased. During these times that I have described as by-products of life and growth it is essential for people to have experiences that have a bonding, unifying effect. During times of turmoil and confusion and renegotiation and re-orientation we need things that will reaffirm our ideals and our sense of identity. We need bonding, unifying experiences that reassure us that somehow everything is going to be OK — some shared experience of great joy or deep sorrow or common challenge — some experience of power that will help us to focus and to grow. These experiences are the glue that holds us together and bring growth and a greater maturity.

The Feast of Christ the King is meant to be a festive, binding celebration that reaffirms our identity as a community of faith. But as soon as I've uttered the phrase *Christ the King*, some of us are aware that there are some problems.

Our government is a democracy, and even though we might love following the Royal Family, most of us remember and give thanks that we once fought a war to remove this nation from the rule of a king. Or maybe there are some who are bothered by the apparent sexist nature of the feast. After all, there's nothing feminist about the title and image of a king.

But in order to preserve and apprehend the bonding potential of this feast let's remember that we're not weighing the pros and cons of different political experiments. We're honoring the One who is the inspiration and the source of all we value and believe. We honor the One who is "before all things — in him all things hold together." We honor Jesus Christ, the King, and for some that's not an easy image to grasp. We're OK with a shepherd or a teacher or a carpenter, but king is a difficult image for some of us. It might be difficult because we have negative feelings about domination and absolute authority, and also because we have seen some terrible abuses that can come when so much power resides in one individual.

But the kind of power we've seen used and abused on a human level is a completely different kind from the power of Christ the King. This king, who is human,

but who is also God, rules with the power of absolute love, not with force or coercion or an authoritarian domination, but with the power of love that casts out fear, the power of love that binds up wounds, the power of love that equips and sustains God's people.

The place where we see the power of this love at its strongest and best is on the Cross where we see Jesus in the role of servant even when it means his death. This is the quality of love that defines the kingship of Christ. He didn't inherit his crown, he didn't buy it with gold and he didn't win it in war.

The kingship of Christ came to him through love — through the love of a parent for an only Son — through the love of a Son for humankind. The celebration of this feast today invites us to center our minds and our hearts and our entire lives on this kind of kingship and on this kind of love.

So what will we do? How will we respond to the changes and chances of this world?

Let me tell you a story about a powerful and wealthy king, and maybe it will help us to decide.

Once there was a great and powerful king who decided that he would share his wealth with his subjects, so he had a huge high-walled compound built in front of his palace. In the center of the compound he placed his throne, and then he had the compound filled with all of the treasures of his kingdom. After everything had been brought out and placed in the compound, the king sat down on his throne and called together all of his subjects.

When everyone in the realm had gathered the king announced, "I am going to share all of my treasures with you. Choose whatever you wish in this compound, and it is yours. Choose wisely, and do not leave until I have dismissed you."

Well, you can imagine what happened. There was complete chaos in the compound as the king's subjects sifted through the possessions looking for the thing that was the most valuable, the thing they wanted most. In the midst of all of that confusion and chaos, a small, old woman with a bent back approached the king's throne and asked, "Your majesty, have I understood you correctly? If I choose anything in this compound it will be mine?"

The king assured the old woman that she understood correctly, and he invited her to choose wisely.

The woman paused for a moment in thought, and she looked hard at the king — deep into his eyes. And then she said, "Your majesty, I choose you."

There was a gasp from the subjects all around and people came scurrying closer to hear the king's response. The king smiled at the woman and said, "You have chosen most wisely, and because you have chosen me, all of my kingdom will be yours, as well."

And there was great rejoicing in the land that day, because the old woman was much loved, and everyone shared in the king's treasure.

The king, Jesus, is the One who offers us everlasting life. He is the One who brings us healing and reconciliation and peace. He is the source of all that is good and noble and true. Through the gift of faith we share, and through the love of Christ, we gain the wherewithal to enter passages and to live and pray our way through the times that threaten to undo us and bring us down. We are united in our prayer and in a bond of faith.

Today we celebrate our unity in this feast of Christ the King. God will continue to send us change and opportunities for growth to remind us that we're alive — that we can count on. We can also count on the love of Christ — the love that will bind us each to the other, and all to God — the love that will help us move from stage to stage, from strength to strength — the love that will take us, if we let it, to our perfect home.

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