

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

The days following the presidential election have blanketed the country with a relative silence as accompanies the gentle falling of snow. Compared with the often angry rhetoric that precedes an election, the cessation of ads, unwanted text messages, and social media hyperbole gives way to calm as the results tell us what people actually thought. As always, winners rejoice; losers lament.

In Missouri the passage of Amendment 3 has legalized abortion again in the State. Catholic bishops spoke out strongly against this legislation, but Missourians voted for it, including many Catholics. Its passage shows the moral dilemma many people face when pregnancy comes at an inconvenient time, from the violence of rape, or the demands that await the parents of an unwanted or unhealthy child. The legalization of abortion is one thing, but the choice to have one is something else. Our church stands ever ready to defend the rights of the child and to assist parents of problem pregnancies. Even where the battle is lost, people can win by choosing life.

Today's passage from the Letter to the Hebrews continues its comparison of Jesus Christ with the high priests of the old covenant. It describes Jesus as the consummate winner. He didn't need to compete for victory over evil; he vanquished it once and for all. Hebrews says Jesus "took his seat forever at the right hand of God." We speak of God's "right hand" every Sunday in the creed. Jesus takes his throne like a king, and he props his feet up on a comfortable footstool—no ordinary footstool, but one literally made of his enemies.

Jesus looks different from the priest of the old covenant who stood "daily at his ministry." You almost feel sorry for that guy when Hebrews describes him "offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins"—like a sales rep who keeps making the same pitch over and over again, but can't draw a single customer from the competitor. The high priest just couldn't take away sin.

When we make our choices in an election, we're probably more like the high priest of the old covenant than like Jesus the victor king. We keep trying with our vote, hoping it will make a difference. Sometimes it makes things better; sometimes worse. But Christ the king always looks over us. He has already won the battle over evil; we are just fighting the skirmishes.

On this World Day of the Poor, Pope Francis had 1300 impoverished Romans over to his place for lunch. He wrote in his annual message, "the poor hold a privileged place in God's heart.... No one is excluded from his heart, for in his eyes, we are all poor and needy. We are all beggars because, without God, we would be nothing. We would not even have life if God had not given it to us. Yet how often we live as if we were the masters of life or as if we had to conquer it! The mentality of the world demands that we become somebody, that we make a name for ourselves at any cost, breaking social norms in order to accumulate wealth. How sad of an illusion this is!" Pope Francis writes. "Happiness cannot be acquired by trampling on the rights and dignity of others."

Now that our election is over, the noisy ads have stopped, but the work of justice begins. Christ has already won the victory over sin, but he needs us citizens to hold our society accountable to defend the rights of all.