

The Work of Building the Kingdom Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe
Sunday, November 22, 2015 12:30 PM Dn 7:13-14; Rev 1:5-8; Jn 18:33b-37
40th Anniversary Celebration of Father Paul's Ordination **(God is the beginning and God is also the end. We are on a journey back to our beginning.)**

In today's second reading from the very difficult Book of Revelation, we hear this very provocative statement in the mouth of Jesus: "I am the Alpha and the Omega." As I said, this is very provocative. I asked the third-graders last night what Alpha meant. One kid said, "Oh, that's a leader." Very good. Wrong in this case, but very good.

Sometimes Jesus' own teachings were very practical and even shrewd; other times they are much more sweeping and visionary. **Today's celebration of the Kingship of Christ is one of those more visionary and sweeping kinds of teachings.** But whether we acknowledge it or not, **people really are desperate for vision.** One of the prophets said, "Without vision people perish." In fact, I believe it's one of the principal characteristics of groups like ISIS or Al Qaeda, that they can give vision to people who are basically aimless and who feel powerless. Emile Durkheim, who is the founder of the science of sociology, said a century ago that **the main characteristic of modern society is aimlessness**, and that is not good. And things have not improved since. Veterans returning from conflict reported overwhelming sadness because war gave them a sense of life, however ironic that sounds. But purpose is not so easy to create either. **The little goals that individuals set for themselves are often shortsighted and flimsy, and when crises come they dwindle away.**

Science, which I love, claims that it can find no purpose in nature, not through the microscope or the telescope or any scope. It simply isn't built into nature itself. It's something else. But **purpose is fundamental to biblical faith.** There would be so no such thing as faith as we know it in our communities of Jews and Christians if it weren't for this **fundamental direction that life has been given by God.** That's the Alpha and Omega. **God is the beginning and God is also the end. We are on a journey back to our beginning,** hopefully growing along the way in awareness and enriching ourselves in all the potential that God places within us. So this movement that God begins and can have a happy ending, that is, a moment of fulfillment, is what this Alpha and Omega is speaking to.

In the Old Testament it's all very vague. But the Jewish people suffered so much for so long in so many different cases, so many different traumas, so many catastrophes, that they had this awareness that they were chosen for something and they were not really their own. **Often people who suffer trauma have this sense that they have been saved for a reason. So it is that the Jewish people ended up with this idea of being chosen.**

In the Christian Scriptures the whole goal is stated a little more clearly, although still not easy to comprehend. **It's eternal communion with God.** It's bringing everything together; in St. Paul's words: **"God becoming all in all."** Again, the words just suggest; they intimate something that we need to ponder, contemplate, wonder about, the Omega, **the purpose of everything, where it's headed.**

Now whether it suits us or not in terms of our language and terminology, **the term Jesus**

used to refer to God's action and direction in life was the "kingdom of God," *Basileia tou Theou*. Now it doesn't fit our way of thinking, but that's what he used, or at least that's what the New Testament says. And that's all we have to go on. **That's what today's feast is about: the Kingship of Christ.** As the gospel today made very clear, **it's not of this world** in this sense. In this world kingdoms and corporations and governments and sovereignties and jurisdictions and cartels are all about power and force. But his isn't, at least not power and force as we normally think of it. And it can't be forced on anyone in any way, but rather it places itself in our hands. We refer to this in the Eucharistic Prayer, or at least some of them. **The work of God is placed in our hands.** In Avila years ago when St. Teresa was still alive, there was a fire in the convent where she lived. And it destroyed most of a crucifix, which the nuns wanted to throw out. And St. Teresa said, "Don't throw that out." The hands had been burned off and the feet had been burned off, and she said, "Leave it; this is to remind us that we are now the hands and the feet of Christ." **The kingdom of God has been placed among us for our taking or leaving because God respects our freedom. So what do you think? What shall we do? Each of us, of course, does answer this question in our own way.** And sometimes we may worry or become concerned that not enough are really answering it in a very positive way but, again, not to worry.

Now we get to the third and most important point: hope. St. Paul says there are three qualities that endure forever: faith, hope, and love or *caritas*, charity, *agape*. Now we always talk about love and we always talk about faith. We don't talk enough about hope. Hope is more important than faith actually. It can't come without some faith, but it's more important. As God is drawing us from the future to himself, the Omega, **we need hope to keep going since we are free not to.** We are free to give up. We are free to screw up. So we need hope to keep going, even when we do give up or screw up. **We have to keep going and hope gives us that something, that vision to keep going,** to see beyond all the ills that are so evident to our senses, and all the problems that our minds can comprehend, beyond all that, the Omega. **We are drawn to something.**

Now this is not the same thing as optimism. Some people are just by nature optimistic, like Pollyanna. Some cultures are, so to speak, "can do" cultures. That's not hope. **Hope** is much deeper. **It is rooted in the belief that God is the Omega, drawing us to something we cannot even imagine,** as St. Paul put it in 1 Corinthians: "The eye has never seen, the ear has never heard, the mind cannot imagine what God is preparing." But it's something, and it's really grand; and words are almost useless in talking about it, **but the whole well-being of the world depends on it, and our well-being depends on it, and the survival of the earth depends on it too, as does our eternal destiny.**

Now in forty years of ministry, I have been edified and often surprised and even astonished at the way **people** can respond to the greatest crises, traumas, accidents, mishaps that come their way. They **can show strength, intelligence, and resilience that they didn't know they had themselves.** We do not know the depths of ourselves. But I must confess often **I've also been quite anxious about people who don't seem to have inner strength or vision or hope for the future.** But I know this, that whatever factors contribute that get people where they are, one of our missions, one of our most important missions as Church, is to **support one another and help us to build up that reality Jesus called the kingdom.** We all need it. And this can happen only when we **nurture in ourselves this flame of faith planted by the word of God.** When our hearts are on fire, according to our own parish calling, **when our hearts are on fire we can**

really make a difference in the world. Look at Pope Francis. Now many people don't really believe in God anymore, and many people are not Catholic who do believe in God, and yet even nonbelievers and unbelievers seem to be moved by Pope Francis. Why? His heart is on fire. You can't help but to see it. You can't help but to even feel it. That is what **our parish leadership community wishes for all of us, that our hearts are on fire and that we really make a difference in the world.** It can be. It can happen.

And we have to realize that **the work of building the kingdom as Jesus talked about it has barely begun.** Yes, it began in him and it's already here, but it's not yet finished by any means. We have only taken baby steps. But, again, hope is the Spirit's gift assuring us that in spite of an avalanche of setbacks, it will come. **It will come, but we have to go along with it.** In the words of **Martin Luther King**, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Now that's a very good understanding of what the Omega means, **the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end—it's a long arc, but it bends toward justice.** We are built in the image and likeness of God. We are designed; we are created. There is a pattern that we've evolved into, and that is basic to who we are. This is the perception that Martin Luther King expressed shortly before he was assassinated. Would he take it back? No, no. No, prophets speak words that are true, even if they themselves can't live them out.

So we continue in the vision, **grateful for all who have shown us God,** God's face or God's heart, or however you want to put it, by their goodness, their generosity, their kindness **in whatever way they have to show us.** And we continue, encouraged by the good example of our sisters and brothers in the faith, and in spite of many disappointments, ready for the many surprises that no doubt await us. I'm grateful for all of you for coming today.