

If you do an online search of pictures of a king, you will probably get a picture of King Kong but mostly you get men in fine robes with lots of gold trim, hands manicured and beard neatly trimmed, usually looking stern, always attempting to look powerful. And that seems like a terrible image for Jesus.

It's not a title Jesus would be comfortable with. When in the gospel of John "they wanted to seize him and proclaim him king," he escaped to the hills. When a Roman soldier asks if he is the King of the Jews, Jesus remains silent. When Pilate asks, "You are a king then?" Jesus responds, "King is your word, that's not my task."

Is there a better word than "king?" Native Americans have labeled Him "**the little buffalo calf of God.**" They have called Him that because, like the buffalo of the plains, He sustained and nourished their bodies and spirit. Eskimos speak of Jesus as "**the little seal of God**" for the same reasons. In the colorful language of parts of Africa He is "**the serpent who moves through the forest without fear, the ax unafraid of the tree, the hoe that doesn't fear the thorns.**" In other areas He is the **vine that confidently climbs into the heavens.** In the Andes, people like to picture Him as a weeping child removing a thorn out of the sole of His foot. The tears help them better to understand how He shares the human condition with them. The thorn reminds them of His passion and suffering for their own selves. These are all images that people feel comfortable with, so how can we make the image of a king a little more comfortable, relatable? Is there something about a king that should edify us?

Academics will point out that states with some form of hereditary monarchy tend to be far more stable in the long run than those whose elected officials changed every few years. Why? - mostly because those who are elected feel the greatest obligation to those who elected them or, at least, those who paid for them to get elected. Political expediency dominates decision making. Even the very best of our presidents, Washington and Lincoln, sometimes felt a deeper obligation to keeping the peace with those in power around them than their obligation to doing what the country needed them to do.

This is particularly evident regarding the issue of slavery. Washington knew that African slavery was immoral, but he also knew that what he called "our peculiar institution" could not be eliminated without losing the support the new country needed from slave owners, both in the North and the South. He allowed politics to trump morality.

Lincoln also knew slavery was wrong. But he entered war with the South to preserve the union, not, initially, to eliminate slavery. He needed the support of the border states, slave states. They would be loyal to the North if they were allowed them to keep their slaves, which they did, at least until the last year of the war. Even then, did you know that the Emancipation Proclamation only applied to the Confederacy? Politics...

Human beings govern through politics. What is politically expedient, what is necessary in order to stay in office, or what is necessary to have one's legacy be respected, most often takes precedence over what is in the best interest of the people who are governed.

Now politics is called the art of the possible and it isn't all bad. Indeed, the greatest achievements of our country resulted from people making concessions to other people, compromises, that might be against something for which they stood, but would result in what the politicians wanted. Wherever there are people, there will be politics.

This includes the Church. The Church, unfortunately, is governed by people who very often weigh their decisions with the opinions of others who share their power, or who have power over them. A study of the history of the Church shows how this was brazenly lived by the hierarchy of the Middle Ages, from Pope Leo X who said, "**God has given us the Papacy, now let us enjoy it,**" to the bishops and priests who used their influence over their people for worldly benefits. Elections are finally over and we are all sick of politics, but how can we possibly escape the fact that we are all in some ways political animals?

That brings us to the Good Thief, who looked at the man next to him who was also being tortured to death on a cross, and said, "**Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.**" What did he see in Jesus that led him to recognize the King of Kings? He did not see any form of physical power. Jesus was dying next to him. He did not see any form of political power. Those in political power put him to death. The leaders of the Hebrews used the Romans to eliminate Christ by invoking politics, "If you allow this man to live, you are no friend of Caesars," they said to Pilate. They forced Pilate to go against his conscience in order to keep peace with the Jews.

It was all quite clear that Jesus had no political power. And, yet, that good thief recognized that he was dying next to a King. What did he see? He saw a man who was so thoroughly united to God that the power of God was evident in His every action. Jesus was only concerned with serving His Heavenly Father. If that meant losing disciples because some thought His teaching on eating His Body and drinking His Blood, was too difficult, so be it. If that meant that calling out those in power to treat their subjects with justice and compassion even though they would perceive these teachings as threats to their power, so be it. If that meant allowing the world to do its worst to Him in order to defeat the grip that evil had on the world because this was the plan of the Father, then so be it. Everything that Jesus did, He did in service to the Father. Everything He did, He did to establish the Kingdom of God. The thief saw the King that the world longed for, the one who would govern not by politics but by the love of God. Jesus would do that by reverencing the Divine Presence in all of creation, particularly in that part of creation made in the Image and Likeness of God, human beings. When he healed the sick, raised the dead, and called others to charity, He showed us how to serve God. Immediately before He gave us the Eucharist, He washed the feet of his disciples and told them and us that what we had seen Him do, we also must do.

How can we escape politics and serve the King of Kings? Look towards the saints for an example. They were all frail human beings with weaknesses and sins. They were all tempted to please others in order to preserve their status, or in the case of the martyrs, their lives.

But they all died with one focus in life, to serve God no matter what the cost to themselves. And so a St. Teresa of Calcutta would leave the relative comfort of teaching in a girls' school because she heard the call to serve God in the poorest of the poor. And so a St. John XXIII was willing to upset the delicate Vatican applecart and call a council to transform the Church, even though he knew he was being treated like a buffoon by some of those in power around him. It would have been so much easier and politically expedient for him "to enjoy the papacy" and be the do-nothing pope some of them had elected him to be. But he chose to serve God, not politics. And so a St. John Paul II could flaunt tradition and transform the papacy from the pope being an administrator to the pope being a missionary. And so a Pope Francis continues to shock the world by having no concern for what is politically expedient, either within the Church or outside it, but only being concerned with serving God.

And so we can serve the King of Kings when the focus of our lives is to serve God in our every action. We can escape the grip of politics be they in our home, our community, our work, our country and even our Church. We can do this by serving the One who created us to love, honor and serve him in all things and in all people.

We are confronted with choices throughout our lives. We can make the political choice, that which will give us the greatest support among others. Or we can make the Christian choice, the choice that would make the presence of the Kingdom a reality in our world. Jesus Christ is our King. He is the King who frees us from politics. We can, and we must serve Him.