The story goes that a burglar had broken into a house and was making his way through it in the middle of the night. He tripped on something, stumbled into the master bedroom and awakened the couple who lived there. He had his gun drawn and the couple was terrified. Pointing the gun right at the woman he said, “Before I put an end to your sorry life, tell me your name.” The woman, barely able to speak, managed to squeak out, “E-E-Elizabeth.” To this, the burglar responded, “Well, this is your lucky night sister. I can’t shoot someone named Elizabeth. That was my mother’s name.” Then he pointed the gun at the husband and snarled, “Okay, bub, what’s your name?” At this the man blurted out, “Well, my name is Bob, but everybody calls me Elizabeth!”

Now I’ve told this story, not just because it’s funny, but because there are two things we find in Bob’s response that have very much to do with the gospel we just heard and the Feast of Christ the King that we are celebrating. First, there is the issue of who is in charge. Now at least Bob knew that the person in charge of the situation definitely wasn’t him. He knew that his life or death was in the hands of another. But, unlike Bob, Pilate didn’t realize that the man who stumbled into his room was really the one in charge of the situation. He thought that the life of Jesus was in his hands. But I have no doubt that if he had known the truth about Jesus, he would have responded just like Bob. For as the King of the Universe, Jesus had all the power in heaven and on earth at his disposal. And he could have used it if he wanted to. But as Pilate saw it, Jesus was just some harmless, deluded person that posed no threat to anyone.

When Pilate tried to gain some clarity from Jesus about what he was doing there, Jesus responded that he had come to bear witness to the truth. And if we would have read a few verses farther in the gospel, we would have heard something of the truth Jesus had come to bear witness to, when to Pilate’s assertion, “Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” Jesus responded quite fearlessly, “You would have no power over me whatsoever, unless it had been given to you from above.”

This is the first great truth that Christ the King had come to proclaim – that God is in charge. God is the one who has power over life and death. The reading from Revelation put it this way, “I am the Alpha and Omega,” says the Lord God, “the one who is, who was, and who is to come, the almighty.” In other words, when all the kings and other world leaders who have ever lived and ever will have exhausted all the power they could muster, God’s kingdom is the only one that will remain.

Now the second thing about Bob’s response to the guy who had pointed a gun at him -- “but everybody calls me Elizabeth” -- is reflected in the gospel in the persons of those who handed Jesus over to Pilate. You see, Bob was hoping to save his life by claiming something about himself that really wasn’t true. Of course, in his case, it was a
real stretch to hold onto this hope -- that the burglar would believe that everyone called him Elizabeth. But something similar could be said of the Jewish leaders who handed Jesus over to Pilate, though they had deluded themselves into believing that what they claimed about themselves really was true. And, at least in their case, it was a bit more believable. To convince their own people and Pilate that Jesus should be executed, they claimed that they only had their peoples and Pilate’s best interests in mind. Yet, again and again, Jesus had testified to the truth about them – that they were unloving, unjust, unkind men who were more concerned about maintaining their own positions of power and status than they were about doing what was good and right.

The truth is that the titles the Jewish leaders used to identify themselves were no more convincing to God than Bob was to that robber when he said that everyone called him Elizabeth. Or to put it a different way -- a way all you football fans will understand -- even after yesterday -- we might say that just because someone wears a jersey that says Buckeye on the front doesn’t mean they are one.

And the Buckeye’s coach Urban Meyer would be the first to tell you that. In fact, I’m sure that right from the start he tells the guys he recruits that to be a Buckeye one has to live according to a certain rule of life, or what he might call a code of conduct. He tells them that they are part of a family and have to treat each other that way – with love and respect. He tells them that a Buckeye does what his coaches tell him to do, when they tell him to do it, and with maximum effort -- and not just on the field but in the classroom too. He tells them that a Buckeye obeys the laws of the university, the NCAA, and the community because if they don’t, they will do harm to themselves, to their teammates and to the university they represent. He tells them that a Buckeye does good things in the community that will help people see that being a Buckeye is a good thing. He tells them that if they are going to wear a jersey that has Buckeye on it, then they’re going to have to live by what it stands for.

But I’m sure he also tells them, that if they really give themselves to living the kind of life that exemplifies what a football player who wears Buckeye on his jersey is all about, while it will be tough at times, and while they will have to make significant sacrifices, it will be the best experience of their lives. And he will promise them that he will give them all the help they need for this to happen.

Well, so it is when it comes to those who would identify themselves as being on the team of Christ the King. Just calling ourselves a Christian, having a cross around our neck or on our wall, is not the same as being one, as living under his reign. The kingdom that Christ reigns over is one in which all acknowledge that God is the ultimate authority and the one upon whom their lives depend. This kingdom is one in which all live according to the things that God stands for. This kingdom is one in which the rule of life is love – that
is, willing the good of all; justice – that is, treating one another in such a way that the good of all is secured; and kindness – that is, responding to one another with the kind of compassion, respect, and mercy that is consistent with the way of love and justice and leads to peace and harmony for all. To call ourselves Christians and not do this is not just untrue, it is harmful -- to us because we are deluding ourselves, to our families, and to others, because it misrepresents what life in the kingdom of God is like. But if we live as Christ calls us to, we show people who good life in his kingdom really is.

Now there is no doubt that to live under the reign of Christ the King is tough at times, and definitely requires some sacrifices. But what Christ promises is that if we give ourselves to living as he has called us to live, it will lead to a peace and joy, to a fullness of life greater than we could have ever dreamed possible. And this wonderful life is something we can begin to share in even now, as a blessed foretaste of the life to come. And Christ promises further, that if we will give ourselves to living the life of his kingdom now, he will give us all the help we need to do it. And it begins right here, right now, as he gives us his word, and shares his very life with us in the Eucharist.

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