

HOMILY
FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING
November 21, 2021
By Fr. Bert Foliot, S.J.

My kingdom is not of this world. I have come to serve, not to be served.

In 1625 a young Saint Jean de Brébeuf sat in his chair in France reading and reflecting on the words of the Gospel we just heard. “So, you, you are a king! Pilate says incredulously. You sure could have fooled me!” Jesus responds, “For this I was born, and for this I came into the world... My kingdom is not from this world... I have come for all peoples... I have come to serve, not to be served.” Brébeuf had heard from the merchants that there were hundreds of thousands of people on the land where they were trading for the beaver pelts and the fox furs, all the rage for rich Europeans. The traders and merchants didn’t realize it, but these inhabitants had been there for tens of thousands of years. Though the Mi’kmaq Chief Membertou and his family were the first to be baptized in the new world some 15 years earlier, Brébeuf heard from the traders that the original inhabitants of Huronia did not know anything about Jesus. He and some of his fellow Jesuits said, “We must go. We must share the Good News with them. We must tell them that God sent His only Son to them so that they might have life and have it to the full.” How could anyone go through life missing out on Jesus. God sent Jesus to these people also. It is not fair that they have never heard of him.

Brébeuf crossed the ocean on one of the merchant ships. The Indigenous peoples soon realized he had a different attitude than the colonizers. The colonizers and settlers believed that they were superior to the Indigenous people. Following the Doctrine of Discovery, which had been formally approved by the Pope, they claimed for their monarchs sovereignty over any land that was vacant. They believed that vacant land was any land that Christians had not populated. They believed that those who were not Christians were not humans, so their land was considered vacant. John Cabot claimed Newfoundland for the English, and Jacques Cartier planted a cross in Gaspé as a symbol of French Sovereignty. Brébeuf would have none of that domination. He came to tell the people how much they are loved by God. God gave His only Son to them.

After being with the Huron-Wendat people for a little while, Brébeuf began to admire these people. They were intelligent, welcoming, good businessmen, and

what delighted him most, was that they had a sense of the spiritual. It was obvious that the Spirit of God was very active in their culture. It is as if he knew what Saint Pope John Paul II over 350 years later would say in 1984 at the Martyrs Shrine, “Christ, in the members of his Body, is himself Indian...Through his Gospel Christ confirms the native peoples in their belief in God, their awareness of his presence, their ability to discover him in creation, their dependence on him, their desire to worship him, their sense of gratitude for the land, their responsible stewardship of the earth, their reverence for all his great works, their respect for their elders. The world needs these values and so many more that they possess.” It is true that at first, Brébeuf found some of their ceremonies superstitious and some of their cultural practices offensive, but eventually he was able to go beyond the differences he saw. He enculturated himself fully and lived in the longhouse with the people, always eager to help with whatever tasks were needed. He learned the language very well. It is said that he is the composer of the well-known Huron Christmas Carol in which all rejoice that “Jesus is born.” Though he taught the Huron-Wendat people about Jesus, he never forced baptism on anyone. In fact, he delayed many who asked for baptism until he felt they really understood all that was involved in the commitment. He knew that the Spirit of God was active among them. He waited, he prayed, and he trusted in God. God loved his Indigenous friends and God was with them whether they were baptized or not.

But Brébeuf and the missionaries were caught in a trade-war between the Iroquois and the Hurons. In the end Brébeuf and his companions shed their blood, because they never wanted to abandon their people. Over a period of 25 years, they baptized 7,000 people, and what is more, they showed the Huron people that Jesus was born a king for them. Jesus came to serve.

As we celebrate our conviction that Christ is the King of the universe, of all creation and of all peoples, and as we see that Christ came to serve, we remember what he told us, “Just as I have washed your feet, so too must you wash each other’s feet.” Could that be the meaning of Reconciliation? We acknowledge the truth of our history of domination, and we settlers commit ourselves to walk hand in hand with the Indigenous people of our land in building and living in “a kingdom that is not from this world.” Amen.

Outline of points for a homily:

- Christ is a king who came to serve not to be served.

- Jean de Brébeuf had that same attitude of service
- Brébeuf admired the Indigenous sense of spirituality and respected it
- Brébeuf did not impose the Christian Faith on the Indigenous people, he offered it. He had a different attitude than the colonizers who came to conquer. He came to be with them, to serve them and to share with them the Good News that God gave them His Only Son, Jesus Christ.