

Father O'Connor's Homily for 24 November 2024  
Feast of Christ the King-B

Daniel 7: 13-14  
Revelation 1: 5-8  
John 18: 33b-37

Sometimes you have to just think outside of the box.

We all know what that means – when we have to stretch our thinking beyond our comfort zones. Sometimes we discover life-giving thoughts and even make life-changing decisions when we allow ourselves to think outside of the box.

But we don't always like to do this. Sometimes we would rather just stay right where we are, and keep other people right where we think they are too.

On this feast of Christ our King, we see Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate, about to be condemned to death.

Pilate did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God or as the King of the Universe. He only saw Jesus as a common criminal, like so many others who had come before him for his judgment. Pilate had put Jesus in a box.

We can do that to other people too, yes? We claim that we know them. Why, we met them once... a couple of years ago... at a sports event. "What a horrible person they are!" we chime in with fellow gossipers.

And yet, when somebody thinks that they have us all figured out, we deeply resent their presumption. But we can still continue to place others on the judgment seat – even as Pontius Pilate did to Jesus Himself.

A reporter was visiting a supper club in Chicago some years ago. He was enjoying his dinner and the orchestra, even though the place was practically deserted. Then he saw an African-American woman in a uniform walk through the dining area, go up to the stage and take the microphone. She sang like an angel, and did a twenty-minute set with the band. When she finished, she put the microphone back in its stand and walked through the nearly-empty dining room and out the door.

He was curious – who was she?

So he followed her and asked. Her name was Millie Gay. She and her sister were professional singers and had toured widely. But some

crooked managers embezzled their money, and they ended up financially ruined.

So there she was in that has-been supper club, wearing the uniform of the ladies' restroom attendant.

Life had been cruel to Millie Gay. So many people had put her in a box. But that reporter took the time to find out who Millie really was. And my, was he pleasantly surprised by what he learned.

But isn't that what we do sometimes? We think we have others all figured out. And we don't always bother to ask them about themselves. But when we do, so often we find that there is so much more to appreciate than we first expected.

Today's Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe, shows Pontius Pilate putting Jesus in a box. And we can do that to Jesus too. Rather than trying to find out who Jesus really is, we construct our own versions of Jesus: the one that we like, and the one who says just what we want Him to say.

Sometimes people want Jesus to be like their pets – always there, causing very little trouble, and offering comfort and companionship. [And sometimes people even treat their pets better than they treat Jesus!]

We can also keep ourselves in a box. Why? Because we are more comfortable there. We are in familiar surroundings. Sin can do that to us too. And the box that sin builds for us can eventually “own” us.

There is an organization that rescues youths from gang life in Detroit. It is called G-R-A-C-E – what a great name! It stands for “Gang Retirement And Continuing Education.” GRACE helps to get the kids out of gangs and into a better way of life through education and job placement.

Part of the program involves removing their gang-related or prison-related or job-stopping tattoos. They say this helps them feel cleansed – and ready to begin a new life with a brand-new identity.

You and I sometimes bear self-identifying tattoos in life – not simply physical ones, but the ones in our minds, our hearts, our emotions. Where we can feel, “How could God love me with all the bad things I have done?” “I'm so old. How can I change now?” “I'm so young. What power do I have to change?”

“I Surrender All,” the song goes. When we surrender to Jesus we are not surrendering to an enemy. We are surrendering to the only One who can truly free us from the boxes we are in, and enable us to become the new

person that He has created us to be – no matter what our age, no matter what we have done or what we have failed to do.

Let us pray. I surrender it all to you, Jesus. Free me from the boxes that my sins and other people have built around me, keeping me from you. I place my life in your hands. You are my King. You are the Lord of the Universe and the Lord of my life. Jesus, I trust in you and your grace. Amen.