Homily by Rev. Robert Schramm, OSFS
34th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Christ the King

I was on retreat this past week up in Riverview, not too far from here.
I was kind of isolated from the news much of the week,
but I did hear two chilling stories from people I know.

A couple whose wedding I officiated about 20 years ago
lives in the Buffalo area.
A few years after they married they adopted two sons from Korea.
One of the boys came home from school the other day
looking very upset.
He said to his mother, “Mom, am I going to be sent back to Korea now?”

The second story is about a friend of a friend who lives in Grand Rapids.
He manages a furniture store there owned by his parents.
One night last week, he was walking downtown in Grand Rapids after work.
He looked up and saw a group of young white men
coming down the street yelling threatening, ugly comments
about blacks and Muslims.
He said he went home and broke into tears.

So, we’re here today celebrating the feast of Christ the King.
I’m wearing celebratory white vestments, we have glorious music
assisted by the choir and handbells.
On a feast like this you might expect a Gospel story
like the one about Jesus being transfigured on the mountaintop,
Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead,
or Jesus coming on a cloud at the end of time as judge.
Instead, we get this story of crucifixion.
The story of a man stripped and suffocating,
wracked with pain it’s hard to imagine.
A crowd spewing hatred at his naked body.
A man hanging between thieves, mocking jeers ringing in his ears,
but speaking blessing and promise to one less fortunate than himself.

What does it mean in this time, in this moment of our nation’s history,
to honor Christ’s kingship through his passion?
What does the cross offer us by way of example, warning
and even blessing?
What story can we tell here that will echo our King’s story?

We can only speculate.
But what strikes me about this Gospel story is what I don’t see:
I see no path to glory that sidesteps humility, surrender and sacrificial love.
I see no permission for us to secure our prosperity
at the expense of the suffering of others.
I see no tolerance for a belief that holy ends justify hate-filled means.
I see no evidence that truth-telling is optional.
I see no kingdom that favors the bullies over the broken-hearted. 
And I see no church that thrives when it aligns itself with brute power.

Where does this leave us? 
I think it leaves us with a King who can make us all very uncomfortable.

A little less than two weeks ago millions of voters 
   decided to “Make America Great Again.”
Perhaps that should leave us wondering what it means 
   to bend the knee to a King 
   who exchanged his crown for a cross.
As I engage in some tense conversations with Christians 
   who voted differently than I did, 
I struggle to honor a King who spoke words of blessing, 
   even in his darkest hour.

As we hear people calling for a quick return to forgiveness and unity, 
   Let’s remember that grace in the Crucified One’s kingdom 
   is neither easy nor cheap; it cost the King his life.

When we’re tempted to hide some form of either denial or apathy 
   in “calm down; God’s in control,” 
   then we’re reminded that Jesus’ kingdom, 
   to use the 50 cent word, is incarnational through-and-through.
It’s a cop-out to expect God to act when I will not.

Next Sunday we will enter into Advent, 
   a season of waiting, longing and listening.
Holding firm to our vision of a better kingdom, 
   we will walk into the expectant darkness, 
   waiting for the light to dawn 
   and straining to hear the first cries of new life.
Yes, there are reasons for fear right now; 
   reasons for anger, reasons for grief.
But we are not a people without hope.
We are not abandoned.
We know where to look for paradise.
We have the right King for this hour.