

## **Criminal King**

I marvel at the choice of the Gospel reading for the Feast of Christ the King. To finalize the Year of Faith, the Church spotlights not the triumphant Jesus but the One sneered as 'King of the Jews', punctured by spears and jeers (LK 23: 35-43).

Jesus the criminal King, turning man's justice on its ear. The blows He took broke the barrier between us; the blood shed rescues us from death, the shattered body makes us whole. The vehicle for our empowerment is His utter weakness.

I celebrated the Mass of Christ the King with 30,000 Philipinos reeling from the worst typhoon on record. We heard of seasoned relief workers returning from the mess traumatized, disoriented. The Archbishop of Manila invoked the power of the Love that descends into devastated lives and heals them.

At the conference where I had the privilege to speak, I met many who had been ravaged by sexual brokenness: the deadly combination of family breakdown and poverty in which kids become subject to sexual violations and gender confusion. Many testified to me personally of early homosexual identification from which Jesus was freeing them. Still others bore the deep brand of brokenness and wondered if God's Kingdom applied to their affliction. In one workshop, a group of male teens strutting about in women's wear, tragic objects of western tourists.

Attending this workshop were the Sisters of Charity who minister to the poorest of the poor on the streets of Manila. They beseeched me: 'How does Jesus help these ones? Help us help them! We love and include these boys but we do not how to free them from their affliction!'

So we follow the Criminal king, descending into the mess to reclaim the dignity of afflicted ones: always working to offer better, more effectual help.

On the way home I pondered how such help has become a scandal in the west. Wealthy nations now criminalize those of us who offer help to the gender broken. I am surrounded by reports of colleagues subject to the most ugly, irrational slams on their good service. These powerbrokers demonize the healers and champion the demonized.

In this we follow our Criminal King: happy to be afflicted on behalf of the afflicted. If we do not stand with our humiliated King, we will not stand at all.

**'Jesus is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For to be sure, He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in Him but by God's power we will live with Him to serve you.'** (2Cor 13: 3, 4)