

Christ the King, C,

When the late Vince Lombardi was head coach of the Green Bay Packers, he was often quoted as saying, “Winning isn’t everything. It’s the only thing.”

This was the philosophy by which he coached football, and it obviously worked. In the nine years from 1959 through 1967, his teams won five national championships. Their overall record was a phenomenal 141 wins, 4 ties, and only 39 losses.

It’s hard to argue with that kind of success, but I must confess that I find myself at odds with the idea that winning is the only thing. It seems to me that there are a few other things to be considered. As an example there are the principles of sportsmanship and the rules of the game. No athletic victory has any meaning unless it is achieved within the limits of fair play.

If Vince Lombardi was alive and with us today, I am sure he would be the first to agree with that. And in so doing he would admit that winning isn’t really the only thing. There are a few other things that matter at least as much. This may seem obvious to some, but once in a while it needs to be said.

It seems to me that our culture is obsessed with the idea of winning. We worship the god of success and look upon failure as the only unpardonable sin.

Do you remember the sad story about a young woman who finished first and then later was disqualified? The official ruling was that she did not run the entire race, but only the last few miles.

Whether she actually did that, I don't know. But if she did, it could be argued that she is simply the child of a culture that has come to believe winning is everything.

I submit to you that we desperately need to rethink that idea. Have you ever considered that judging by our standards Jesus would have been regarded as a loser? He accumulated no wealth. He held no powerful office. He offended most of the influential people. Many of his closest associates were social outcasts. While he was still a young man, the public opinion turned against him, and he was executed as a common criminal.

Our Gospel reading for today tells the tragic story of his death. He was nailed to a cross; and above his head was an inscription which said: "This Is The King of The Jews." No one really believed that, not even the man who wrote it. The Jews took it as an insult, and the soldiers thought it was a joke. But on this day around the world, millions of Christians are gathered to celebrate the feast of Jesus Christ the King of the Universe.

I find myself wondering how serious we are about all of this. Do we really believe that Christ is the King? The King of what? Whose King? In our society, we worship winners. And Jesus certainly wasn't one, at least not in our common usage of the term. We think of a winner as someone who knows what he wants, goes after it, and gets it. Jesus tried to call his nation back to God, and failed.

We think of a winner as a young man who starts out with nothing and becomes a millionaire before he is forty years of age. Well, Jesus

didn't even live to be forty; and when he died, he was a long way from being a millionaire and showed no signs of ever becoming one.

We think of a winner as someone who enters into a competition, gives it all he's got, and beats the other guy. But Jesus wasn't interested in beating any one. His philosophy was: "When a person strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other."

We think of a winner as someone who gains supremacy, have power, and has scores of servants waiting to carry out his every command. Jesus, on the night before he died, took a basin of water and towel, and washed the tired and dirty feet of the few followers that he had left.

There is something terribly inconsistent about all of this. In a world that worships winners, we are gathered to proclaim a Loser as our King. How can we explain that?

Well, I will tell you what I think. I think that down deep on the inside every one of us knows that winning really isn't everything. There are some things that matter a whole lot more, and those are the things that Jesus represents in your heart and mine.

You see, he didn't have to lose. He could have played the game our way, and then he would have come out a winner - our kind of winner. But by now, the whole world would have forgotten; you and I would have probably never heard of him; and no one would be calling him the King.

He didn't have to turn the other cheek. He could have fought back. He could have organized an army like so many of the Jews wanted

him to do. He could have led that army against Rome, and he might have won. That would have probably gotten him a page in history. But what good would that have done? Does the world really need one more army? One more military victory? One more earthly king?

He didn't have to die on that cross. He could have run away and hidden. He could have compromised his integrity just a little bit and avoid the whole thing. But he was unwilling to do that. It wasn't that he wanted to die. It was just that he chose to die rather than sell out the things he believed in.

I guess what I am saying is that Jesus really wasn't a loser at all. He was in fact, the greatest winner this world has ever known. Down deep in our hearts we know that he was everything that we are not, and wish we had the courage to be. And for that reason we are gathered today to bow before Christ the King. **Amen.**