

I sometimes watch legal drama's and recently saw one with the following basic plot. The story was about a female defence lawyer who represented a man convicted of two brutal killings before a parole board. He was seeking release from prison after serving 14 years and she succeeded in getting him released. A policeman who was present at the original crime scene gave the lawyer a rough time after the hearing, telling her that she should not be representing such people, that the man she was defending was nothing but scum. Later that day the police officer discovers that the lawyer's mother had died from cancer the night before and so, the next time he sees the lawyer he says, "I'm sorry, if I had known your mother had died I would have gone easier on you."

Another character in the story - the deaf prosecutor who was the main star, also gives the lady lawyer a hard time for representing the killer before the parole board - and she too, later hears about the mother's death. The next time the prosecutor sees the defence lawyer she also says to her - "Sorry, If I had known I would have gone easier on you."

How often do we say such things?

Realistically, it happens all the time; in the normal bustle of daily living when we are moving too fast, or feeling in need of help, we fail to recognize what is happening around us and forget what it is that we should be about. Sometimes we load up other people with our own burdens and pains only to discover later on that the person is dealing with their own emotional burden, a burden far heavier than our own. Sometimes we ask someone to do this or that thing without considering their work load. We just assume that the other person is (or should be) willing to assist us, only to discover later on that they have just put in a double shift at work, or that a relative of theirs' has just be in accident. Other times we may jokingly tease someone about something, thinking that we know them well enough to have a bit of fun with them, only to discover later on that he or she is very sensitive about the very thing we thought was safe to tease them about.

And we realize that we have blown it. That we have acted inappropriately, and we seek out the person concerned and in almost every case we say something like:

if I had known, I would not have asked you that,  
if I had known, I would not have said that,  
if I had known, I would not have bothered you.

As we come to the end of the church year, we are asked to remember that Jesus, when all is said and done, is our King, and I can't help thinking that when it comes to our obedience to him, when it comes to our willingness to show him our respect and honour, many of us end up making the same mistake with him that we make with other people: we blunder ahead on a business as usual basis, being casual, abrupt, and insensitive until, all of sudden it seems, we realize that something special is going on.

What is this "If I had known" excuse anyway? It is a genuine kind of excuse, people are very sincere when they offer it, but does it really count for a lot in the long run? Shouldn't we be caring and loving and respectful all the time? Shouldn't we always pay attention before we say or do something? Shouldn't we honour our Lord and our King all the time, and not just at special times like Sunday morning?

Think of the crucifixion of Christ for a moment. Just about everyone there from the guards and the Pharisees, to the thief on the cross next to him, taunted Jesus. saying to him: "If you are the king, then save yourself and save us too!" It is pretty obvious from the gospel story that none of these people recognized Jesus for who he was: And this meant to them that they could abuse him as they might abuse any convicted criminal.

To them nothing special was going on; it was business as usual, business without thinking,

business without considering what it was that God would want out of them, regardless of whether this man on the cross was the Messiah or simply a misguided fool. If those who acted this way at the foot of the cross could come back and stand before Christ today (like we can) they would say to him: “Sorry Jesus, If I had known I would have gone easier on you, If I had known I would have taken your part like the other thief took your part, I would have wept for you instead of jeering at you.”

What does it mean to claim that Jesus is our Messiah, our King, our Lord? Doesn't it mean that we are to act differently? To show him our respect? To strive to honour him and obey him and serve him at all times? And never more so than when he is actually here with us?

A little story for you.

Once upon a time there was a wise man who was meditating in his mountain cave when he had an unexpected visitor come to him. It was the abbot of a local, well-known monastery. “What is it you seek?”, asked the wise man. The abbot recounted a tale of woe, how at one time his monastery had been famous throughout the western world filled with young aspirants and its church had resounded to the chant of its monks. But hard times had come on the monastery. People no longer flocked there to nourish their spirits, the aspirants had dried up, and the church was almost silent. There were only a handful of monks left and these went about their duties with heavy hearts.

Now this is what the abbot wanted to know - “Is it because of some sin of ours that the monastery has been reduced to this state?” “Yes,” replied the wise man. “One of your number is the Messiah in disguise and you are ignorant of this,” and having said so he closed his eyes and returned to his meditation.

Throughout the long journey back to his monastery the abbot's heart beat fast as he thought that the Messiah - the Messiah himself! - had returned to earth and was right there in his monastery. How was it that he had failed to recognize him? And who could it be?

Back in the monastery the abbot assembled all the monks and told them what he had discovered. They looked at one another in disbelief. The Messiah? Here? Incredible! But he was supposed to be here in disguise. So, maybe...what if it were so and so? Or possibly...

One thing was certain: if the Messiah was there in disguise, it wasn't likely that they would recognize him. So they took to treating everyone with special respect and consideration. “You never know”, they said to themselves when they dealt with one another, “maybe this is the one.” The result was that the atmosphere of the monastery became vibrant with joy. Soon dozens of aspirants were seeking admission to the order. - and once again the church echoed with the holy and joyful chant of monks who were aglow with the spirit of love.

Jesus, our Messiah, our king, is here today somewhere in this church, somewhere in this community. And we owe him because he is our King and our saviour; we owe him our praise, our obedience, our special honour and care, not just in our times of prayer but in each minute of each day as we meet him as we go about our normal business.

None of us can really say to him “if only I had known,” because we do know. And we are called to show our respect and our devotion each and every day.