

Solemnity of Christ the King

November 23, 2014

Readings: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17; 1 Cor 15:20-26, 28; Matthew 25: 31-46

One November morning a few years ago, while waiting for the General Audience to begin, I struck up a conversation with a gentleman named Fabrizio, one of papal ushers. Our group had arrived two hours early in order to secure the best available seats. Formerly known as **Papal Chamberlains**, many came from Roman families that had served the popes for several centuries.

While speaking with Fabrizio, I asked how long he had been working in the direct service of the Pope and he replied with a sense of pride, “Dal Millenovecento Sessantaquattro,” i.e. “Since 1964.” He mentioned that he has met U. S. Presidents and other Heads of State. Knowing a little of the history, I asked if he had in fact carried the popes on the *sedia gestatoria*, the portable throne on which Popes were carried until 1978. “Absolutely,” he replied. He carried the chair for Pope Paul VI, John Paul I, but explained that John Paul II preferred to walk under his own power, and would not allow the use of the sedia.

But then with a hint of a smile, he added, “We did carry him, but only once,” an obvious reference to his solemn task of carrying the simple wooden, unadorned casket of Pope John Paul II out of Saint Peter’s square, placing on the ground. Paradoxically, it became the most powerful image of the entire funeral.

The Solemnity of Christ the King is a study of contrasts, a paradox of sorts. Signaling the last Sunday of Ordinary Time, we honor Christ in full solemnity, as King. But when we encounter Jesus at Calvary, our entire image of kingship is called into question. We wonder how a king may also be a servant. How do we square service with royalty, kingship with servant leadership, honors with humility?

But as with the ceremonial throne used for 1000 years that also served a very practical purpose of making the Pope visible to the people, other such trappings have been set aside in our day, lest the centrality of the Gospel message is obscured. Pope Francis has become well known for his simplicity. Still, having conquered all sin, Christ remains our King, ruler of heaven and earth.

For us to recognize Christ as our King means that we understand Him as **the** true sovereign in our lives. The CCC states: “Christ the Lord already reigns through the Church, but all the things of this world are not yet subject to him.”¹ It is at the end of time that the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. The Church does not sit idly by watching as various forces try to gain the upper hand in society. We are not powerless. While some would deny God’s authority over the human society whose author He is, we must exalt Christ as King over all our families and of our own lives.

In the Church today, more than ever, we rely upon the active participation of the laity, their expertise, their wisdom and input. Please know of my gratitude for all the ways in which you, the good people of God, help us to carry out the mission of the Church. I ask you to seriously consider ways to volunteer, whether as lector, RCIA sponsor, usher, choir member, Women’s Association, Dorothy Day volunteer, and the list goes on. There is space and need.

In fact, the Kingship of Christ helps to strengthen our witness, for the graces received enable us to overcome all enemies, most notably our sin and pride. We are so blessed to have the vision of the Lord set before us, as our model of our holiness. When we follow him, we can no longer look at the world in the same way. May our love of the world never turn to idolatry. We worship our Lord and King, and Him alone.

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. #680.