

The Solemnity of Christ the King is a study of contrasts. When we encounter Jesus at Calvary, our mental image of kingship is called into question. We wonder how a king may also be a servant? Perhaps this is due to poor examples among those in positions of power and authority. The real power that can be exercised is one of servant leadership, a model that is not merely a dream, but a reality in the person of Jesus. Leaders can be servants, whether as political or business leaders or certainly one would hope, as Church leaders.

For us to recognize Christ as our King means that we understand Him as **the** true sovereign in our lives. Our faith teaches us that “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.

But the Church does not sit idly by watching as various forces try to gain the upper hand in society. We are not powerless. We hold forth the model of servant leadership and try wherever possible to instill this way of thinking and living into our lives and those whom we help to form as future leaders both in society and the Church.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, even as we hail Him as our King. He promises to save, to heal and to nourish; he is gentle and humble, and yet he will also triumph once for all over every sovereignty, authority and power. In doing so, he ushers in his kingdom in its fullness, a kingdom of truth, life, holiness, grace, justice, love and peace, as we will hear later in the Preface assigned for the Mass. That kingdom so beautifully described in prayer increasingly seems to be illusory.

Today is a special day of prayer for persecuted Christians. Through the servant leadership of groups such as the Knights of Columbus,

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. # 680

Catholic Relief Services and others, the U.S. Catholic Bishops are drawing our attention to the needs of our brothers and sisters in need, in large part due to the difficult circumstances in which they live, too often persecuted simply because they are Christians.

Yet, as our Catechism reminds us, “All however must be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the Cross, amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks.”²

Today’s solemnity reminds us that when we pray “Thy kingdom come,” we are praying for a kingdom for which many of our sisters and brothers are currently suffering persecution. The *Prayer over the Gifts* is fitting for those suffering persecution: “that your Son himself may bestow on all nations the gifts of unity and peace.”

Our Catholic faith includes many expressions in the various “rites” represented, similar to branches on a tree. The Catholic Church in the Middle East is in full communion with Rome, and made up of seven different “Rites,” each bearing a great and ancient history along with unique liturgical traditions. All these Churches are immersed in Arabic culture and speak Arabic, although some liturgies are conducted in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke.

The **Chaldean Catholics** count over 600,000 members, historically concentrated in Iraq. Many emigrated to the United States, especially near Detroit **Syrian Catholic Church** is spread throughout much of the Middle East, but roughly 130,000 of its 200,000 members are in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. I should note that these Catholic Churches have been integrated into their societies for centuries.

They are not strangers in the Middle East; they were there in some cases centuries before the advent of the Islamic faith. They form part of ancient Christian communities that have long contributed vibrantly to their societies in the fields of science, philosophy,

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1816, quoting from *Lumen Gentium*, #42

education, and medicine. We ought to see them as brothers and sisters and I urge you to offer your prayers for their well-being.

Part of being a member of a universal church centers upon our common faith as well as being aware of our common concerns and travails. We stand united and in solidarity with all who are persecuted in these ancient lands.

When we acknowledge the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus in our lives, this does not make us powerless. In fact, it serves to strengthen our witness, for the graces received enable us to overcome all enemies, most notably our sin and pride.

Yes, for want of leadership a people perishes; for lack of vision, we all suffer. We are so blessed to have Jesus set before us, as our model of servant leadership.

When we follow him, we can no longer look at the world in the same way. We remain attentive to its blessings and its many challenges. We love the world, we still desire to live in its midst. We worship our Lord and King, and Him alone.