

Solemnity of Christ the King Year "C"
November 23-24, 2019

Jesus our King, our source of strength.

Readings: 2 Samuel 5:1-3; Colossians 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43

Most Americans remain unsure of what to make of royalty. It was brought to light earlier this week with the revelation that a member of the British Royal family has been relieved of official duties, even moving his office out of Buckingham Palace. He forfeited his allowance from the sovereign grant, a government expense account, though he retains his title. Retaining a title absent of any specific duties is odd; though in this case, entirely understandable.

What is in a title anyway? Are they relevant in today's world? That is a legitimate question, though I would argue titles are only meaningful if the one holding a title is living out the function faithfully and diligently. The lay faithful call priests "Father," and rightly so. But if we priests are not acting as spiritual fathers, caring for the flock entrusted to our care and leading them to the saving truths of Christ, it is an empty title.

Christ the King Sunday invites us to consider royalty in a different light. Following upon the lived experience of the Jews and peoples of the ancient Near East, the concept of kingship is all throughout the scriptures. There had always been a ruler from the tribe of Judah until the Romans imposed Herod, first as Tetrarch, then as King of the Jews in 37 B.C. Shortly before the birth of Jesus, there was intense messianic expectation in Israel.

The Kingship of Christ is founded upon the sacred humanity of Jesus. The title of King belongs to him as man in the proper sense. For it is only as man that he may be said to have received from the Father "power and glory and a kingdom," as foretold by the prophet Daniel (cf. 7:13-14.) Do we see in Jesus Christ the cause of our joy, the defender of our true freedom and the source of our strength? But even more to the point, do we accept his rule in our life?

I remember the bumper stickers that were popular in the 1980's: "Question Authority." I was so tempted to pull up next to someone at a stop light, toot the horn to get their attention and say, "Why should I? Who are you to tell me that I should question authority?"

But as the history of corrupt governments has proven, at times it is absolutely necessary to question authority. The lay faithful have questioned the authority of leaders in the Church, due to past mistakes, manifestly bad doctrine, or other malfeasance. Poor leadership damages people's trust, and it is not easy to regain it.

But it is equally dangerous to mistrust authority on principle. Some wrongly conclude that authority is at best a tolerated evil. But it is not. Jesus was invested with divine authority as our ruler. His rule is one of love, benevolence, mercy and compassion. It is also a kingship of justice, giving others their due. We all answer to God's authority, even those who dismiss it or ignore it.

Jesus is our loving Savior and our just ruler. There ought to be a healthy fear of his authority, even when that power is exercised seemingly against us. I say "seemingly" because it is never exercised against us, but only according to what we deserve. The conversation of St. Dismas on the cross highlights this perfectly. Refer to window.

"Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us," said the criminal next to Jesus. This misguided display of pride was quickly answered by the *good thief*, before Jesus even answered. "Have you no fear of God?" Dismas continues: "And indeed, we have been condemned justly." Then he adds: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus responds: "Truly, I say to you, *today* you will be with me in Paradise. Life is being with Christ, because where Christ is, there is his Kingdom."¹ It is a paradox to be sure.

¹Pope Benedict XVI, 25 Nov. 2007: St. Ambrose: *Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke*, 10, 121).

Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, yet he came into the world. His enthronement only became complete on the gibbet of the Cross. There, he experienced utter forsakenness so that we might find true freedom. Today's solemnity is a call to hope against hope that the eternal priest and universal king has implanted within us a new rule, one that guides us to the promised land.

His rule in our lives casts out fear, the fear that holds us captive and all too often leads us to seek refuge in society's rulers, blindly following the latest false promise of security, friendship and fulfillment.

Conversely, fear can also draw us further into ourselves, shutting us off from a world that is seen as evil in itself. "Divine love has become 'at home' on the earth through him."² Thus we are called to trust in this kingly rule of Christ and to believe that he will rule us with equity and justice and in love.

As we observe the last Sunday of this liturgical year, let us beg God's continued blessing, that we might recognize Christ's sovereignty, not as one of subjugation, but of making possible our fullest freedom by entrusting our lives to His loving hands. Praise be to Christ our King.

² "The King and His Kingdom," Hans Urs von Balthasar, from *You Crown the Year with your Goodness: Sermons Throughout the Liturgical Year*, p. 240.