

Solemnity of Christ the King Year “C”
November 19-20, 2022

Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat!

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

This past September, though very early in the morning, more than 11 million Americans tuned into the beautiful and well-executed funeral for Queen Elizabeth. Across the pond, the BBC estimated 28 million watched. Though our nations separated 246 years ago, the Queen was greatly respected, even if Americans have little experience with royalty.

The Solemnity of Christ the King Sunday invites us to consider royalty in a different light. Titles are only meaningful if the title holder is living out the function faithfully and diligently. The lay faithful address their priests as “Father,” but if we are not guiding the flock entrusted to our care, leading them to the saving truths of Christ, its merely an empty title.

The Kingship of Christ is founded upon the sacred humanity of Jesus. 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.) It is also a kingship of justice, giving others their due.

Later in today’s Mass [10:00 a.m.], our choir will sing *Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat!*¹ “Christ conquers, Christ reigns, Christ commands.” Historians surmise that when Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day in 800 A.D., this anthem was invoked.² If true, it may well have been the pope’s intention to remind Charlemagne who was **really** in charge!

But it is precisely in **how** Christ carries out his rule that distinguishes him from other rulers. He is the cause of our joy and the defender of our true freedom. His rule is entirely different from how the world so often views power; it is one of love, benevolence, mercy and compassion. “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us,” said the criminal beside Jesus. Such a misguided display of pride was quickly answered by the *good thief* Dismas: “Have you no fear of God?” adding, “Jesus, remember me

¹ *Christus Vincit* (“Christ Has Conquered”), by Joseph Noyon (1888-1962), who served as organist and or choir director at several Parisian churches.

² Reginald Maxwell Woolley (1915). *Coronation Rites*. Cambridge University Press, page 43.

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.”³ We are called to be with him.

Looking back and recognizing his inner struggle, St. Augustine noted:

In my public life I was striving after the emptiness of popular fame, going so far as to seek theatrical applause, entering poetic contests, striving for the straw garlands and the vanity of theatricals and intemperate desires.⁴

He was searching for happiness and fulfillment in the wrong places, all while acknowledging that in his “private life,” he was “seeking to be purged from these corruptions.” He was torn and locked in fear of letting go. But this is precisely what we must do to find happiness and peace.

Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world, and 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 we acknowledge 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, blindly following the latest false promise of friendship and fulfillment. “Divine love has become ‘at home’ on the earth through him.”⁵ As we observe the last Sunday of the liturgical year, let us beg God’s grace, 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.

³Pope Benedict XVI, 25 Nov. 2007. Cf. St. Ambrose: *Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke*, 10, 121).

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book IV, Ch. I

⁵ “The King and His Kingdom,” Hans Urs von Balthasar, from *You Crown the Year with your Goodness: Sermons Throughout the Liturgical Year*, p. 240.