

SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE KING

Year A: Ez 34:11-12, 15-17; Ps 23; 1Cor 15:20-26, 28; Mt 25:31-46

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Today's Feast of Christ the King marks the end of the Church's liturgical year. Next Sunday is the First Sunday of Advent, when a new year begins in the Church. Each year in the Church begins with Advent, in preparation for the birth of Christ at Christmas, and is then followed, after some weeks, by Lent, when we prepare for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery at Easter. Then the weeks of Ordinary Time follow, to mark the other mysteries of Christ's life and teaching. And it all leads up, every year in the fall, to this Feast of Christ the King, when we honor Christ as the Lord of our lives and the Lord of the whole world. We know that Jesus Christ is our Lord and our Savior, but on this feast day, we also honor Him as our *King*.

Such a feast might sound odd to some in our modern times, especially here in the United States, where we have a democracy, and not a monarchy, for our civil government. But, no matter what kind of earthly government we have, for us who are Christians, Christ is still always our *King*. And this is because we believe that all of creation, and every country in it, is under the dominion of God, over which Christ reigns as King. As Pope Pius XI stated, when he established this feast day for the Church in 1925, "[T]he empire of our Redeemer embraces all men. ... [F]or all men, whether collectively or individually, are under the dominion of Christ. In him is the salvation of the individual, in him is the salvation of society. ... '*[F]or there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved*' [Acts 4:12]" (*Quas Primas*, 18). And, as the Second Vatican Council taught, "The Lord [Jesus] is the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and of civilization, the center of the human race, the joy of every heart and the answer to all its yearnings" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 45). In a word, He is our *King*.

Our Lord Jesus was granted this kingship over all of creation by God the Father because He redeemed the whole world by offering His life on the Cross. His kingdom has begun here on earth, but it is not yet completely fulfilled, since all men are still free to accept to reject Him. And so, Christ is working through His Church to bring His kingdom to fulfillment, by winning souls for God the Father. He does this by teaching us how to live and by extending and applying to us the merits of His death on the Cross, so that we can share in God's divine life. Christ is working from Heaven, through the Church, to bring His kingdom to ultimate fulfillment. As St. Paul explains in his first Letter to the Corinthians, which we

heard in the second reading, “[T]hen comes the end, when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power. ... When everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all.”

But Christ does not force anyone to be a citizen of His kingdom or to recognize and worship Him as King. As Vatican II taught, “For [Christ] bore witness to the truth, but He refused to impose the truth by force on those who spoke against it. Not by force of blows does His rule assert its claims. [His rule] ... extends its dominion by the love whereby Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws all men to Himself” (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 11). In the Kingdom of Christ, souls are conquered by love. Christ wills that people will choose freely to belong to His kingdom by responding in love to His great act of love that redeemed the world.

So, if we *do* want to be subjects and citizens of His kingdom, it means that “[Christ] must reign in our minds, which should assent with perfect submission and firm belief to revealed truths and to the doctrines of Christ. He must reign in our wills, which should obey the laws and precepts of God. He must reign in our hearts, which should spurn natural desires and love God above all things, and cleave to him alone. [And] he must reign in our bodies ..., which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls” (*Quas Primas*, 33). This is what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom of Christ.

And so, each year on this Feast of Christ the King, we should recommit ourselves to letting Christ reign more in our own lives, so that He will be able to reign more in the world. You see, the more each of us follows Christ and submits to His teachings, the more His reign will overflow out of our lives and into the world. People will begin to see that we belong to the kingdom of Christ by how we live, and hopefully they will see how beautiful and meaningful life is when Christ reigns in the soul. If we want Christ to be recognized as Lord and King by the whole world, we must admit that it all begins with His reign in our own souls and our own lives. The more we love and follow Christ, the more likely the whole world will come to love and follow Christ, and then worship Him as King. And the more that happens, the more souls will come to live with Christ forever in His kingdom in Heaven. Amen.