

Feast of Christ the King – November 22, 2015

Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 1:5-8; John 18:33-37

On the last Sunday of the liturgical year the church celebrates the Feast of Christ the King. This feast expresses the all-embracing authority of Christ as King and Lord of the Universe. This feast helps us to look towards our future and our ultimate future is when Jesus will return in glory for the final judgment and award reward or punishment. This Solemnity is a newer feast in the Catholic Church. The feast of Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 and is observed on the Last Sunday of the liturgical year as it helps us to meditate on Christ the King and Lord and also on the Second and Final Coming of Christ, the last Judgment, and the end of the world. The Pontiff himself was witness to a turbulent time in the world's history. The First World War had just come to an end. Secularism was on the rise and dangerous dictatorships were emerging in Europe and beyond. Christ had long been referred to as King, but Pope could see the respect and reverence for Christ's authority waning in the midst of the unrest during the early part of the 20th century. In response, the feast was set with the intent to reaffirm and refocus faith and respect in the kingship of Jesus. Pope Pius XI felt that nations would see that the Church has the right to freedom, and immunity from the state. Secondly that leaders and nations would see that they are bound to give respect to Christ. Finally that the faithful would gain strength and courage from the celebration, as we are reminded that Christ must reign in our hearts, minds, wills, and bodies.

In the world of democracy the titles of "Lord" and "King" for Christ may not be realistic because such titles are borrowed from oppressive systems of government. The kings are often identified with pride, undue use of authority, wars and sometimes even immoral lives. However true these statements might be these individuals miss the point: Christ's kingship is one of humility and service. Jesus said: You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to become great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. To Pilate he said that his kingdom was one of Truth and for this he was born and for this he came into the world to testify for the truth. Today's Mass establishes the titles for Christ's royalty over men: First of all, Christ is God, the Creator of the universe and hence extends his supreme power over all things; "All

things were created by Him". Secondly, Christ is our Redeemer; He purchased us by his precious Blood, and made us his property and possession. Thirdly, Christ is Head of the Church, "holding in all things the primacy". Finally, God bestowed upon Christ the nations of the world as his special possession and dominion. Today's Mass also describes the qualities of Christ's kingdom. This kingdom is primarily supreme, extending not only to all peoples but also to their princes and kings. Secondly, it is universal, extending to all nations and to all places. Thirdly, it is eternal, for "The Lord shall remain a King forever". Finally, it is spiritual, Christ's "kingdom is not of this world".

During his life Jesus preached the Kingdom of God and openly told the disciples to seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness. He indicated that they must put God first in our lives. It was necessary that they came under the rule of this God/King, Jesus Christ. It demanded that they confess Jesus is Lord, and do what he had asked them to do. He alone is King of kings and Lord of Lords. He called his disciples not servants, but friends, and bestowed on them a share in his priesthood and kingship. Though he died, unlike other kings he died willingly to save his people, and his death was not a result of a battle lost or a plan gone awry, but of a glorious victory planned before the world began. He rose in glory, and went to his heavenly coronation. Jesus knew perfectly well the oppressive nature of secular kings, and in contrast to them, he connected his role as king to humble service, and commanded his followers to be servants as well. Christ is the king that gives us true freedom, freedom in Him. Thus we must never forget that Christ radically redefined and transformed the concept of kingship. Christ Himself spoke of his own kingly authority in his last discourse, as he explained the rewards and punishments that will be the eternal lot of the just and the damned. After his resurrection, when giving to his Apostles the mission of teaching and baptizing all nations, he took the opportunity to call himself king, confirming the title publicly, and solemnly proclaimed that all power was given him in Heaven and on earth.

In today's First Reading, Prophet Daniel announces a more comforting scene, namely the coming of the Son of man, who has been given "dominion and glory and kingdom". He comes served by "peoples, nations and languages" and his "dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed". The scene is filled with brilliance and fire. God carries the title Ancient of Days and God is limited by time as are the ancient rulers. The new king is given power, authority, glory and kingship over all people, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed. The present Kingdom of God on earth, spiritual in nature, invisible to the naked eye, is one that shall remain

forever. This human figure contrast to the vision that begins with the vivid description of the four beasts with such disturbing appearance. These four creatures in the first vision represent the empires that ruled over God's faithful people. Now the human figure that comes will pass judgment over the beasts is filled with heavenly brilliance. He represents God's faithful people and his origin is from above as shown by his arrival on the clouds of heaven. He arrives from heaven giving them the hope and his kingdom is everlasting. This passage indeed refers to the God who is dwelling among his people as the rightful King. His Kingdom has arrived on earth as promised by God.

Today's Second Reading from the Book of Revelations presents Jesus as a King of Love. The passage of today refers to the supreme kingship of Christ who founded a kingdom for us. In this kingdom he has made us persons dedicated to the service of God his Father. John tells us that Jesus proved his love by dying to free us from sin. He deserves the honor and submission of all creation. He will come in glory again at the end of times. Jesus manifests his Kingship in a special way by forming a kingdom for priests for his God and Father. Those who believe in him become priests and are to be mediators between God and man. Jesus is our witness to God. He has revealed God to us and God's plan for us and as a faithful witness he gave his life to prove the truth of what he preached and revealed to us. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is God Almighty, who was, who is and who is to come. Surely, this is the reference to an all pervading God who existed and will exist all the time. And this cannot just be a reference to the future as some allege regarding the Second Coming and the future Kingdom of God. His kingship will remain forever. He has established his messianic Kingdom whose first stage is the church and will find the final glory in heaven. Written during the Roman persecution, it was easy for the people to lose hope, to forget the saving presence of God. During this time John reminded people of the Risen Savior in their midst to give them new hope.

The feast of Christ the King celebrates the fact that he is one who is remarkably different. He came to serve all and his kingdom is divine. In several passages of Scripture, his kingdom is tied to his suffering and death. While Christ is coming to judge the nations, his teachings spell out a kingdom of justice and his judgment is balanced with radical love, mercy, peace, and forgiveness. The Scriptures speak of Jesus as God and also as King. He was born in the royal Davidic family. Joseph and Jesus were not biological father and son, but legal father and son, and, therefore, the throne of David belonged legally to Jesus. In the annunciation narrative we have angel Gabriel bringing the good news to Mary in Nazareth,

saying, "He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." When the Magi come to Jerusalem they ask "Where is the one born king of the Jews?" The priests inform them that he is born in Bethlehem. During His ministry on earth, Jesus preached that the Kingdom of God was at hand. He said that His Kingdom was not of this world. Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God was coming, and he answered that it was already among them. During his triumphant entry into Jerusalem people call him son of David and greet him as a king. Later during his passion when Jesus is before Pilate, he is asked whether he is the king of the Jews. Jesus responds saying he is the king. Finally before his Ascension, Jesus told his disciples that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. He is the king of the universe, ruling over all.

The Gospel of today speaks of a strange confrontation between Pilate, the Roman Governor and Jesus given only by John. An encounter between a man who feels as the chief authority of a colonial regime, that he has unlimited power and Jesus, a travelling preacher who seems to have none. Pilate asked Jesus whether he is the king of the Jews. Jesus who was bound as a prisoner and scourged for no wrong he had done, stood before the governor courageously and asked him whether it is an honest question or a question that arises out of all rumors he had heard. Jesus conversed with him as if they were equal which did not please Pilate. Jesus showed that real power and real authority remained not in positions or titles but in the inner strength of the person. Yet he explained to Pilate that his kingdom was spiritual. Pilate was filled with the wrong idea that the kingdom can only be political and not otherwise. Although Jesus did not explicitly respond to him by saying that he was a King, he did speak very clearly about his "Kingdom" and his "Kingship" and he told him that his kingdom was not from this world. This kingdom Jesus explained was based on justice and truth which Pilate failed to understand. At the same time he made it clear to Pilate about his kingship but the kingdom he ruled was not what Pilate had been talking about. Historically this was one of the charges the Romans leveled against Jesus. Yet Jesus remains real King who has come to save the world through his self-giving. He rules not by power but by truth and his truth is the full revelation of the Father.

Ultimately Pilate and Jesus agree that Jesus indeed was a king. The answer Jesus gave to Pilate should not be understood as an attempt to sidestep the issue. When Jesus said he was a King he made it clear that his understanding of himself as a king and the kingdom he ruled was not what Pilate was talking about. Jesus never

made a claim to be a secular ruler of any kind nor did he declare any secular nation under his power. The Kingdom of Jesus is defined by his place of origin. He is not from this world and he comes from the Father and therefore he is King of God's Kingdom and not of this world. Jesus as king therefore was quite different from the conventional image. His presence did not fit into the Messiah-King image portrayed by people. Jesus had no army, no power and no political influence. In front of Pilate at this moment he looked anything but a king. Again when he was brought before Pilate he announced, Behold the man. This became a sign of mockery and rejection and even a gangster was chosen in his stead. His kingship of truth and justice was totally rejected. Yet it is very important for us to understand that the cross was the sign of his victory and is the throne of the king. It was a victory for life, for truth and for love. Jesus conquered death because he accepted it and passed through it. Jesus is saving this world through a process of total self-giving. Jesus ruled not by power but by truth and his truth is full revelation of the Father. The kingdom of God over which Jesus presides consists of the presence of God manifested fully in the reality of Jesus. Whoever listens to the voice of Jesus and believes in him is a member of the Kingdom of God.

We express our faith by calling Jesus our King who is the master of our human hearts. The kingdom of God over which he presides consists of the presence of God manifested fully in the reality of Jesus. Whoever listens to the voice of Jesus and believes in him is a member of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is really our King when we consciously become his subjects, when we listen to him, love him, serve him, and follow him. We belong to his kingship when, like him, we have reached that level of freedom which can really let go of everything, even of life itself in the struggle to make our world a world of truth, justice and love. That is the struggle to help make real the prayer we constantly say, "Your Kingdom come!" Paradoxically, one of the best ways to know Jesus is to go about helping others to know him. In order to share the knowledge, understanding and love of Jesus with others, we have to discover that knowledge, understanding and love for ourselves. As we reflect on all the goodness of God that we have received by the grace of God the Father through Christ the King, our calling, our living faith, our Baptism, our new heart and human spirit, the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Sacraments, the fruit of the Spirit that shine through us, let us give thanks to Christ the King for showing us the way to His eternal Kingdom. We remember God's love -God's mercy. We find hope again, and surrender in repentance to the God who cherishes us.

On the final day of their school year a teacher in a school asked her grade four children to draw something special that touched their lives in the course of the year. The children concentrated in drawing something unique. Some drew a picture of God, another a church, a third, a cow and the fourth a tree with fruits and so on. There was a boy in the class shy and withdrawn and he drew a nice little hand which attracted the attention of all. The drawing was beautiful. Each one tried to explain that it is the hand of God, of the friend, a parent and so on and no one asked the boy what he meant by it. When he was all alone the teacher went to him and asked him what he meant by this hand. The little boy looked up and said: Madam, it is your hand. When I entered the class I was shy and lost and your hand brought me to the class and has guided me throughout. It is yours, my teacher's hand.

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