

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

On the last Sunday of each liturgical year, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ as the king of the universe with the Feast known as, Christ the King Sunday or the Reign of Christ Sunday. Today is a feast in the liturgical year that emphasizes the true kingship of Christ. This feast was first instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI as a response to growing secularism and atheism within the world. This feast day is set aside to remind us that while governments come and go, Christ reigns as King is forever.

Christ's kingship is rooted in the Church's teaching on the Incarnation. Jesus is fully God and fully human. He is both the divine Lord, true God and the man who suffered and died on the Cross which is also referred to as the hypostatic union. This hypostatic union is a central belief that our salvation depends on...the belief that Christ had to become fully human to share his full divinity with humanity. One person of the Trinity unites himself to human nature and reigns over all creation as the Incarnate Son of God. So as we gather this day to celebrate Jesus Christ as King, what comes to mind or what sort of images do we conjure up in our mind of Christ the King?

Perhaps we envision the old images that are inspired by the King James English in St. John's Gospel:

²In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (John 14:2 KJV)

Or perhaps our visions are inspired and undergirded with John's apocalyptic thoughts and images of a new Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation:

"And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Revelation 21:2)

"And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." (Revelation 21:10-11)

And in these images perhaps we see Christ our King on a throne, seated upon a large golden chair, with soft velvet pillows and cushions with Christ himself decked out in the finest of rare furs and adorned with the most rare of all jewels. Of course, this vision will be illuminated just as John saw it in Revelation:

⁵And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 22:5)

What would our vision of the reign of Christ the King be without the prophecy of Isaiah envisioning a place of peace and contentment...a place where:

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together...(Isaiah 11:6)

And a place where:

...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2:4)

Maybe Daniel's prophecy comes to mind:

¹³ As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. ¹⁴ To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14)

Imagining Christ as King on His throne will more than likely be set in a courtroom type of place. And in that room we will be called into, Christ sits as judge and this courtroom is, complete with an audience of all the nations along with a jury of saints and angels...and with the banging of His gavel, we are separated out like sheep and goats. Of course!!!we envision ourselves as a sheep because we have faith and a religious freedom that says I can believe what I want! So, woe to those poor goats, they only get what they deserve for their secularism and atheism.

Sadly though, religious freedom for some people means that we can believe whatever we want and carry out that belief in the public square and the marketplace. And when we do speak of Christ, we may not speak of anything that relates to faith or the humble servitude nature of Jesus Christ. However, as the body of Jesus Christ, we the Church recognize the reign of Christ and live out our faith in public not with a legalistic attitude toward others, rather the solemnity that Christ the King encourages us to be, and that is His mercy, His grace, and His forgiveness.

No matter the reasoning, there are those devout Christians who also live under that same religious freedom who will tell you that if your God is not like my God, then you are nothing but a goat and you will go away into eternal punishment where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Against such folly or stupidity, Bonhoeffer wrote this:

“Against stupidity we have no defense. Neither protests nor force can touch it. Reasoning is of no use. Facts that contradict personal prejudices can simply be disbelieved — indeed, the fool can counter by criticizing them, and if they are undeniable, they can just be pushed aside as trivial exceptions. So the fool, as distinct from the scoundrel, is completely self-satisfied. In fact, they can easily become dangerous, as it does not take much to make them aggressive. For that reason, greater caution is called for than with a malicious one. Never again will we try to persuade the stupid person with reasons, for it is senseless and dangerous.”¹

But we don't worry about that because we are the sheep that are in the know and not the goats that have no clue. We know too that Bonhoeffer is merely referring to those goats and not us.

¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, Edited by Eberhard Bethge. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971. This quote is found in the opening chapter, “After Ten Years. A reckoning made at New York” pages 1-17, specifically page 8. The word “stupidity” “stupid person” is used in many modern translations of this work in place of folly and fool.

Looking then a little closer at our Gospel lesson today there is something I find very striking when we assume our roles, be it a sheep or a goat...both sides, the righteous and the accursed, or the sheep and goat ask the very same question of Jesus:

“Lord, when was it that we saw you...”

...hungry, thirsty, as a stranger, imprisoned, or naked, or even sick?

Bonhoeffer makes a very bold comment about this question asked by both the righteous and the accursed, Lord, when was it that we saw you. This question, Bonhoeffer points out, is simply an excuse for doing nothing. So in light of this, we amplify our visions of Christ as the king by setting Jesus Christ upon a golden throne decked out in extravagance because we assume our role as the righteous seated next to him in this glory. When in reality, right or wrong, we have no clue, when we saw the Lord or experienced the Lord as we went about our life. The real questions are, does Christ the King reign in our minds, in our wills, and in our hearts or does Christ the King take a backseat to our assumptions and prejudices as we make, what we think are very valid points against the laws and precepts of God, by not seeing him or reflecting his mercy. Jesus says to the disciples and to us today:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;

The earthy shepherd separates his animals by their type of body, whereas Christ the King separates people by their very soul or the very nature of their soul. Look around you, and look into the hearts of your brothers and sisters who are around right now, and now point out who are the sheep and who are the goats? We cannot do it, only God can. God will parse out the sheep and the goats.

As far as our vision of Christ the King...maybe the pristine image of Christ our King seated upon a golden throne and decked out in rare furs and adorned with the most rare of all jewels sets well with you...and that is fine, but I believe there is another image of Christ the King to consider.

That royally-righteous image is one I could never be part of, I feel just don't fit in...I'd feel like a brown shoe in a room full of tuxedos...and I would be asking, where is our Lord? Or...Lord when was it I saw you?

The image of Christ the King I invite you to consider is an image that says, despite your lowliness and despite your sin you will be with me in paradise. St. Luke draws a glorious image of Christ our King on His throne in heaven this way:

³³ When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [[³⁴ Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.']] And they cast lots to divide his clothing.³⁵ And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' ³⁶ The

soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine,³⁷ and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’

³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?’⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’⁴² Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’⁴³ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’ (Luke 23:33-43)

Here is Christ our King in all His glory!

Today as we attempt to imagine Christ the King we are given a lesson in mercy versus works and we are being challenged to live and be His mercy without calculation. As we imagine Christ the King in all His glory suffering upon the cross we see God’s reign takes us all to a place of suffering and NOT to a haughty palace.

God’s reign in Jesus Christ is here with us not in power and might but in mercy, forgiveness, and suffering and our access to the reign of this king is through these very things. If you think these facts contradict your personal prejudices, Jesus calls his disciples and tells them this:

...‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.²⁶ It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant,²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave;²⁸ just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’ (Matthew 20:25-28)

Christ’s reign as King has dominion over all creatures and creation, a dominion not seized by violence nor usurped, but by his very essence, his human participation and suffering, and by his very nature his reign of mercy endures forever. May Christ’s nature of grace and mercy reign in our minds...may it reign in our wills to follow and obey the laws and precepts of God...and may Christ the King fill our hearts to serve and love our neighbor just as He served and loved us. Today we celebrate Jesus Christ our King, and in His glory, our King says to each of us, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.