

Homily of Thirty-Fourth Sunday, Christ the King of Year A, 2020

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17; Psalm 23:1-3, 5-6; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28; Matthew 25:31-46

The feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, was established by Pope Pius XI in 1925, not long after the end of the First World War. The pope established the feast as a statement of faith against the prevailing ideologies of communism and secularism at that time. The two ideologies attempted to exclude faith, religion and God from humanity. This feast is even more relevant to us now that we face many anti-Christian and anti-Catholic ideologies like secularism, materialism, relativism, anti-clericalism, and persecution of Christians. By celebrating this feast, we are upholding the teachings of the Scripture, the teachings of the Church and to continue to proclaim Jesus Christ as our leader and king.

The kingship of Jesus is clearly stated in the Scripture: The King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15); the ruler of the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5); he is the Lord of lords and King of kings (Revelation 17:14). Jesus declared in Matthew 28:18, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me." In Philippians 2:9-10, St. Paul writes, "God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord..."

The people of Jesus' time did not understand that the earthly kingship of Jesus was not political but spiritual. His disciples asked him before he ascended into heaven, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The Pharisees had, also, asked him when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus' reply gives us a good understanding of his earthly kingship we are celebrating today: "The coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed, and no one will announce, 'Look, here it is,' or, 'There it is.' For behold, the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:21).

This means that the universal kingdom is not remote in a distant land, or in the heavens, or across the sea. The universal kingdom is within us, around us, and among us; in our homes, our parishes, our churches, our neighborhoods, our institutions, our work places, our business places, our market places, our gatherings, our environments, and so on.

The first reading is Prophet Ezekiel's prophecy of Jesus' universal kingship. He came to the cloudy and dark world to die in order to save the scattered sheep. He came to seek out and bring back the strayed, to bind up the injured, to heal the sick. Jesus is no longer physically with us; but by his Spirit, Word, and Sacraments he empowers, us, his followers to continue his saving works.

Jesus confers his power and authority on his followers by declaring in Luke 10:19, "Behold, I have given you the power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you." Mark 16:17-18, "These signs will accompany those who believe in my name: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

As his Christians, we are kingly people (1 Peter 2:9); we are co-heirs of the kingdom with Jesus (Romans 8:17); and we are to reign with him (2 Timothy 2:11). Jesus can only rule the universe through us if we take up this power and use it. As we read in the Gospel, it is with this power we are able to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and care for the sick and prisoners.

The accolades in the above paragraph (kingly people, co-heirs, reign with him) bestowed on us, Christians, must not be for nothing, especially, in the face of so much affliction in the world; further polluted by non-Christian vicious lies, deceptions, and ideologies. We must respond, positively, to this urgent invitation from Jesus: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force" (Matthew 11:12). St. Paul challenges us to cast away the spirit of cowardice (2 Timothy 1:7), and take up the power and the force Jesus has given to us, to stand firm as kingly people and co-heirs, to reign with him, and to confront the sufferings, the ills, the decadence, and the violence in our world. It is by so doing, the Solemnity of Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe is meaningfully celebrated.

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