

SOLEMNITY OF JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE – November 21, 2021

Daniel 7:13-14; Psalm 93; Revelation 1:5-8; John 18:33b-37

"What is truth?" These are the words of Pilate that follow Jesus' statement that is the last line of our Gospel passage: "For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth hears my voice." It's hard to determine the tone of that question from Pilate, but most commentators feel that Pilate is more or less scoffing at Jesus, saying something like, "Don't tell *me* about truth" as if Jesus was in any position to tell Pilate anything. Or maybe Pilate was saying "There is no real truth," which seems to be the mindset of our relativistic society today. The tone of this question might be, "What is truth?" Well, it's whatever I determine it to be, right?

But part of me would like to give Pilate the benefit of the doubt and think that maybe he was sincere in asking Jesus "What is truth?" After all, isn't that what all of us are really want to know? What is truth? Jesus himself tells us earlier in the Gospel of John: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6). And the truth is, Jesus *is* a king, but he's a king unlike any other, and as he tells Pilate, "My kingdom does not belong to this world."

The Church throughout the world this Sunday celebrates the feast of "*Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.*" This feast was established by Pope Pius XI in 1925 in response to growing secularism and atheism. He believed this feast was necessary because the people at that time had "thrust Jesus Christ and his holy law out of their lives" and that they "had no place in public affairs or in politics." He felt that living in this way would result in continuing dissension among people and nations. (Thank Goodness we've all gotten past that!) The pope also said "that as long as individuals and states refused to submit to the rule of our Savior, there would be no really hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations." This was written almost 100 years ago! You might think (and you would be right) that this could easily be written today.

The Church professes Jesus as our king, but he is a different kind of king. He is not a king of this world. His kingship is not the kind of kingship people would expect. His crown is made of thorns rather than gold. His throne is not a mighty chair in a palace or castle where he can hide, but a cross, where he is displayed in front of everyone in disgrace. Jesus as king came not to be served, but to serve, and to testify to the truth.

The biggest difference between the kingship of this world and the kingship of Jesus is that the kings and rulers of the world want power and glory for themselves. They use their influence for control and make it known to everyone else. Jesus, on the other hand, wants us to share in his glory and power. He wants us to enjoy everything he has with him. Even though his kingdom is not "of this world," it is here and now, and if we are his disciples, we are also his subjects.

And as his disciples, we should know that the only way we might share in his glory is also by sharing in his act of total self-giving. By our imitation of Jesus in our self-giving we give glory and power to God, and it is this glory and power that he shares with us. And this is the challenge for each one of us. We are called not simply to pay homage to Jesus, but to do as he did. This means that every day we must live in self-sacrifice, because only through the cross is God's kingdom possible for us. Living the paschal mystery means living the cross. Just as the cross was the way to the exaltation of Jesus, only when we embrace *our* cross can we find the way to our own entry into the heavenly kingdom.

But the kingdom of Jesus isn't only in the future in heaven. In his many parables Jesus would say "The kingdom of heaven is like a tiny mustard seed. ... The kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea. ... The kingdom of heaven is like a field of wheat." And at the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus said "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15). The kingdom is here and it is now.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "*Christ dwells on earth in his Church. ... 'The kingdom of Christ [is] already present in mystery,' 'on earth, the seed and the beginning of the kingdom.'*" (669) "*Christ's kingdom already manifests its presence through the miraculous signs that attend its proclamation by the Church.*" (670)

So the kingdom is now; it is present in the Church, and we are a part of it. Do we realize what dignity we have? We are called by virtue of our baptism to share in the mission of the Church, which is to continue the mission of Jesus. This is part of what Saint Paul means when he says "... in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church" (Col 1:24).

The Church calls us to acknowledge Christ's kingship with our whole lives. Pope Pius XI said when he instituted this feast:

He 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. He must reign in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls, or to use the words of the Apostle Paul, 'as instruments of justice unto God.' (*Quas primas*, 33)

This feast today reminds us that there is a power in this universe that is greater than the power of any physical strength. It is greater than the power of wealth, the power of hatred, or the power of any political force. It is the power of love and truth, which is revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ and through the Church which he established. This power of love and truth which is Jesus Christ *will* overcome all the powers of evil. We may wonder and worry where our country, where our world is headed. We might think that morality is going down the sewer (and we'd be right). But in the end, evil *will not* win.

Looking back to the first reading, we are told and we believe that the Son of Man, who comes on the clouds of heaven, will receive "dominion, glory, and kingship; all peoples, nations and languages serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed." And we should all recall the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary: "he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33).