

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST KING OF THE UNIVERSE [A] 11/22/2020

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, celebrated each year near the end of November concludes the current Church calendar year. Unlike some other great feasts where the Scripture readings are the same every year, for Christ the King there is a different set for each of the three years. Fittingly, our Gospel today for Cycle A is drawn from the account of St. Matthew, whose Gospel has been providing us with almost all of our Sunday Gospels since last November.

Today's passage is found only in the Gospel of Mathew. It begins quite simply: JESUS SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES. But always in seeking to understand the true meaning of a portion of a Gospel, we have to ask some basic questions: to whom were the words of Jesus addressed, when and why? Chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew are sometimes termed the "Olivet Discourse" because Matthew has told us at the beginning of chapter 24 that Jesus is on His way to visit His friends in Bethany just on the other side of the Mount or Garden of Olives from the city of Jerusalem. Jesus has stopped to rest a bit and while sitting there His disciples who are accompanying Him ask Jesus, privately we are told, some questions about the end of world and the day of final judgment. In many ways today's Gospel text is a quite fitting passage for this final Sunday in 2020 that the Church reads from Matthew's Gospel. What we just heard is taking place in the final week of the public ministry of Jesus. He has entered Jerusalem in triumph just days before on what we call Palm Sunday. The words of Jesus that come right after today's Gospel are ominous. He says to those disciples with Him: YOU KNOW THAT IN TWO DAYS IT WILL BE PASSOVER, AND THE SON OF MAN WILL BE HANDED OVER TO BE CRUCIFIED. And Jesus was. And tacked over the head of Jesus, as He hung there dying, and then as He did die on the cross, were the words the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate himself, had ordered to be placed there in three languages: Latin, Greek, and Aramaic. The sign read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF JEWS. Today this often appears reduced to the four letters of these words in Latin: INRI, *Jesus Nazareus*,

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Rex Judeorum. Actually, the two letters that look like I's to us are in reality in Latin capital J's. By this sign Pilate was anticipating, it would appear, by nearly 2000 years Pope Pius XI who established as recently as 1925 today's Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

How do kings become kings or in some cases queens become queens? As far back as we have records, especially in Europe, it comes about by their being anointed, that is, by having sacred oil, usually from an olive tree, poured or daubed on them. That is how Elizabeth II became queen in 1953. In much the same way our present bishop, Gerald Barnes, became a Bishop when oil was poured on his head in 1992.

Sacred oil is used in four of our seven sacraments -- three of which, Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders -- also leave an indelible seal on the soul of the recipient. The fourth is even called the Anointing of the Sick. The three oils used in these sacramental rites, that of the sick, the catechumens and Sacred Chrism, are blessed or consecrated afresh each Holy Week by the local Bishop, surrounded in non-pandemic years by his priests and deacons at what is known as the Chrism Mass.

In the Anointing of the Sick, the forehead and the two palms of the recipient are daubed with the Oil of the Sick. In Confirmation, Sacred Chrism is applied in the form of a cross on the foreheads of those being confirmed. In Holy Orders the hands of the priest being ordained are anointed with Sacred Chrism, and should he be consecrated a bishop one day, Sacred Chrism will be poured on his head. When we were baptized two oils were used, the Oil of Catechumens was applied to our upper chest and Sacred Chrism was poured on the crown of our head after our baptism with water. The priest or deacon said: GOD THE FATHER ANOINTS YOU WITH THE CHRISM OF SALVATION. AS CHRIST WAS ANOINTED PRIEST, PROPHET AND KING, SO MAY YOU LIVE AS A MEMBER OF HIS BODY, SHARING EVERLASTING LIFE. Through these various sacramental anointings that we have received, we are not only Christians, but *royal* Christians. The English

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word, Christian, comes from the Greek, *christos*, which means the oiled or anointed one, that is, the kingly or royal one. "Christ" is not the family name of Jesus. "Jesus Christ" means in English, Jesus the anointed or Jesus the kingly one. Anyone who calls himself or herself a "Christian", is truly saying, "I too am royalty in and through Jesus the King, whose subject I am. I too am an anointed one."

In today's Gospel, which Mathew presents to us as the final sermon of Jesus, after years of public ministry, the words of Jesus are clear and powerful, directed as much to us as to His disciples sitting around Him on the Mount of Olives. Either we serve our brothers and sisters in very real, simple, down-to-earth ways, by feeding them, clothing them, visiting them when sick or imprisoned or, if we don't, we shall go off to eternal punishment, while those who do these things, the righteous ones, will go off to eternal life. Remember that you and I have been anointed -- once or twice or thrice. And so, we too are royalty, with a kingly obligation to care for those all around us -- as we heard Jesus bid us do so forcefully today. And we also learned today -- as we say farewell this weekend to St. Matthew and his Gospel for a time -- what our royal reward will be for serving others: eternal life in the heavenly kingdom.

Finally, let our cry today be the dying shout of many of the Catholics martyred for their Faith in Mexico in the 1930's, in the lifetime of some able to worship at a Mass this day: VIVA CHRISTO REY. "Long live Christ the King!"