

Solemnity of Christ the King – (Year B) – November 25, 2018

DN 7:13-14; PS 93:1, 1-2, 5; RV 1:5-8; JN 18:33B-37

In 1801, when **Pope Pius VII** was negotiating with **Napoleon** over the status of the **Catholic Church in France**, the Emperor lost his temper with one of the Pope's theological advisors, **Cardinal Ercole Consalvi**. Napoleon threatened to crush the Roman Catholic Church and said as much to the cardinal. Cardinal Consalvi responded:

If in 1,800 years we clergy have failed to destroy the Church, do you really think that you'll be able to do it?

<http://boatagainsthecurrent.blogspot.com/2009/02/quote-of-day-cardinal-ercole-consalvi.html>

The wise Cardinal's response to the French dictator 217 years ago should give us some **perspective...and *encouragement*...today.**

After all, if the Church were a merely *human* institution it would have folded **long** ago...long **before** 1801. In fact, it would have collapsed right around the year **33 AD** or so, shortly after **Judas** betrayed Jesus and **got Jesus executed** as a result of that betrayal.

Judas betrayed Jesus—and Jesus was put to death.

End of story.

End of his kingdom.

Except for **one thing**...

That **one** thing...is *something*...that the **Prophet Daniel** prophesied about the coming Messiah in our **1st Reading**:

His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, his kingship, one that shall not be destroyed. (Dn 7:14)

And in our **2nd Reading** today, from the **Book of Revelation**, we heard:

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth. (Rev 1:5)

Neither this **King**—*Jesus*—nor his **Kingdom**—the *Church*—can be destroyed. Not from the **outside** by her enemies. And not even from the *inside*, by her corrupt leaders. Because *the Church is Jesus*—his **mystical body**.

Death could not conquer Jesus, nor his Church.

And if **even death** could not conquer Jesus, then neither can the **sins**—*even the gravest of sins*—of her scheming shepherds!

Psalm 146 helps us keep our perspective:

Put no trust in princes, in mortal men in whom there is no help. Take their breath, they return to clay and their plans that day come to nothing. (Ps 146:3-4)

We can easily lose hope (and **charity!**) if we put our faith in **popes, cardinals, bishops** and **priests**. Because there is **no guarantee** that popes, cardinals, bishops and priests will remain faithful to Jesus, despite their vows.

Thankfully, *Jesus has not made the Church dependent upon the holiness of her leaders*, though the holiness of the Church's leaders **is** a crucial aspect to **effective** evangelization.

This point is driven home by a commentator, writing in the context of the **Vatican's prohibition of the US Bishops** voting on much-needed reforms a couple of weeks ago at their annual meeting in Baltimore, wrote:

In one of the stories from the 14th C. Italian novelist Giovanni Boccaccio...a Christian named Giannotto urges his Jewish friend Abraham to convert. When Abraham says he's going to Rome to observe the pope and the other leaders of the church, Giannotto, knowing how debauched and corrupt the Vatican is, fears his friend will never convert once he sees the pope and the Roman curia in action. But when Abraham returns, he converts, having

concluded that the truth of Christianity must be protected by God with such [imbeciles] running the church.

<http://thefederalist.com/2018/11/23/clergy-sex-abuse-crisis-dredging-old-heresy/>

From the time of **Judas** right up until today, there have always been—and will always be—**unfaithful leaders** in the Church who will try to **undermine** Jesus’ kingship because they **behave like the depraved** whom St. Paul described in his **Letter to the Romans**:

...although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for [their idols]. (Rom 1:21-23)

Archbishop Fulton Sheen suggested that it was right after Jesus multiplied the loaves, and after the people tried—unsuccessfully—to make Jesus **their** king—on **their** terms—that **Judas** became disillusioned with Jesus. The **Gospel of John** tell us:

Perceiving then that [the people] were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself. (Jn 6:15)

This verse comes from John, Chapter 6—which contains the **Bread of Life Discourse**—Jesus’ extensive teaching on the Holy Eucharist in which he says that **in order to have eternal life, we must eat his Flesh and Blood** (cf. Jn 6:53).

We know that in verse 66—and we recall here that **this is John 666**—many, if not most of Jesus’ disciples **abandoned** him over his **teaching on the Eucharist**. As we note the contrast between those who left Jesus and those who stayed, pay attention to what the passage says about **Judas**:

After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. Jesus said to the twelve, “Will you also go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?”

He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was to betray him. (Jn 6:66-71)

The decisive factor here—as Peter pointed out—was **belief in the words of Jesus**—*the words of eternal life* (cf. Jn 6:68). So, we have the **food of eternal life**—the **Eucharist**—and the **words of eternal life**—the **teachings of Jesus**.

Not **one** without the **other**. But **both...together**.

Judas could not accept that Jesus was a **different kind of King** than the one he—Judas—wanted.

And when we look at what happened to Judas at the **Last Supper**, we see the **full extent of what rejection of Jesus means**:

...Jesus...was troubled in spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast of Jesus; so Simon Peter beckoned to him and said, “Tell us who it is of whom he speaks.” So lying thus, close to the breast of Jesus, he said to him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. (Jn 13:21-27)

Judas had just received Holy Communion, and, at that moment, Satan entered him. What a terrifying thought! **Unworthy reception of Holy Communion was the occasion of Judas becoming possessed!!**

This should give us great pause to consider the **damage we do**—and the **danger we expose ourselves to**—when we *receive Holy Communion unworthily*. There is nothing benign or harmless about **dissent** from Jesus’ teaching coupled with insistence on **taking** the Eucharist while in that state of disobedience.

And there is nothing more scandalous than a shepherd of the Church—whether a **pope**—a **cardinal**—a **bishop**—or a **priest**—encouraging the faithful to disregard

Church teaching and to **take**—and notice I’m deliberately saying “**take**” instead of “**receive**”—to *take* Holy Communion. Remember what Jesus said about such evil clergy:

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea. (Mk 9:42)

In today’s Gospel passage from the **18th Chapter** of the **Gospel of John**, Jesus tells **Pontius Pilate** the condition for loyalty to him—to Jesus—as King:

For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. (Jn 18:37)

Conversely, those who do **not** listen to the voice of Jesus do **not** belong to him. And it doesn’t take a genius to figure out who they **do** belong to if **they**—if **we**—reject Jesus.

And so, our project for remaining a loyal subject to *Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe*, becomes one of sifting through the **many competing voices in the Church today**—*voices that are competing for our souls*.

How do we know when someone who has been given the authority to teach and shepherd us—but who, himself, refuses to listen to Jesus—how do we know when such a false shepherd is misleading us? We measure their **words** and **actions** by **these words** from the **Letter to the Hebrews**:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever. (Heb 13:8)

So, if we hear a **pope...a cardinal...a bishop...a priest...or anyone else...teaching** something that **we know** does not sound **right**—even if it sounds *interesting* or *attractive*—then we know we are dealing with a **false shepherd**. If we look at **what the Church has always taught** and then hear a *wolf in shepherd’s clothing* calling that teaching into question, then we know we are in danger.

If we hear a member of the clergy saying, for instance, that a person does not have to repent from **grave sin** in order to receive Holy Communion, then we would do well to recall what happened to Judas at the Last Supper. And we would do well to pray for that *wolf in shepherd's clothing* whose neck is being **fitted for his own millstone** because he is following in the footsteps of Judas...and leading others off the same cliff.

In his discourse about the **Good Shepherd**, Jesus said:

...the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. (Jn 10:3-5)

In the **Book of Revelation**, Jesus said:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Rev 3:20-21)

Jesus is a very different kind of King—he's truly one-of-a-kind. Because unlike worldly kings who want to amass power for **themselves**, even at the expense of his subjects, **Jesus wants to share his Kingdom with us.**

Thus, this Good Shepherd, who loves his sheep is also the King of the Universe who wants to make us—his lambs—into royalty.

Long live that kind of King.

Long live Christ the King!