



Christ the King Sunday, the final Sunday of the Liturgical year is a feast day that focuses on the authority of Christ. While the problems our world faces today differ from the particular events that inspired Pope Pius XI to establish this feast in the 1920s, his message and call to honor Christ the King in a society that denies the authority of Our Lord is no less pertinent now than it was then.

History of the Feast

The solemnity is a newer feast in the Catholic Church; it was established by Pope Pius XI in 1925. The pontiff was witness to a turbulent time in the world's history. Secularism was on the rise and dangerous dictatorships were emerging in Europe and beyond. Christ had long been referred to as King, but Pope Pius and the Christian faithful saw the respect and reverence for Christ's authority waning in the midst of the unrest during the first part of the 20th century. In response, the feast was set with the intent to reaffirm and refocus faith and respect in the kingship of Jesus.



On the importance of the public world recognizing the kingly authority of Jesus, Pope Pius XI wrote:

“When once men recognize, both in private and in public life, that Christ is King, society will at last receive the great blessings of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony. Our Lord's regal office invests the human authority of princes and rulers with a religious significance; it ennobles the citizen's duty of obedience. It is for this reason that St. Paul, while bidding wives revere Christ in their husbands, and slaves respect Christ in their masters, warns them to give obedience to them not as men, but as the vicegerents of Christ; for it is not meet that men redeemed by Christ should serve their fellow-men. ‘You are bought with a price; be not made the bond-slaves of men.’

If princes and magistrates duly elected are filled with the persuasion that they rule, not by their own right, but by the mandate and in the place of the Divine King, they will exercise their authority piously and wisely, and they will make laws and administer them, having in view the common good and also the human dignity of their subjects. The result will be a stable peace and tranquility, for there will be no longer any cause of discontent.

Men will see in their king or in their rulers men like themselves, perhaps unworthy or open to criticism, but they will not on that account refuse obedience if they see reflected in them the authority of Christ God and Man. Peace and harmony, too, will result; for with the spread and the universal extent of the kingdom of Christ men will become more and more conscious of the link that binds them together, and thus many conflicts will be either prevented entirely or at least their bitterness will be diminished.”

As detailed at Churchyear.net, Pope Pius XI was hoping for these effects to occur:

That nations would see that the Church has the right to freedom, and immunity from the state.

That leaders and nations would see that they are bound to give respect to Christ.

That the faithful would gain strength and courage from the celebration of the feast, as we are reminded that Christ must reign in our hearts, minds, wills, and bodies.



The feast was initially fixed to the final day of October, the day before All Saints Day. Later, in 1969, Pope Paul VI moved the feast to the last Sunday before Advent, to emphasize the importance of the feast. This is fitting within the Church year. The liturgical year begins with Advent, the season of awaiting the coming of Christ, and now the year ends with celebrating the Kingship of Christ.

History of the Title “Christ the King”

While the feast is relatively new, the tradition of calling Christ “King” is not. Jesus is referred to as King throughout the New Testament:

To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen – 1 Tim 1:17

Nathan' a-el answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” – John 1:49

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.” – Mt. 27:11

And this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords – 1 Tim 6:15

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages!” – Rev. 15:3

And from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood – Rev. 1:5

On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords. – Rev. 19:16

Clearly “King” was one of the earliest titles given to the Son of God. The title does not refer to a status of an earthly king, which many of the Jews had been expecting – someone to overthrow the Roman rule and be earthly king of the Israel. Rather He came to be the spiritual king; His kingdom is in heaven, not confined to the earth alone. In respecting the name of Christ the King, and in celebrating the yearly feast, both citizens and leaders are to remain reverent and devoted to the higher authority of Christ.