



Homily for 11/24/2019

Christ the King, Year C

Rev. J. David Carter, JCL

On this, the last Sunday in Ordinary Time, we are asked to focus our attention specifically on the person of Jesus Christ, especially in His quality as King. The name of the feast is Christ the King of the Universe. Universe is meant not in the astronomical sense, but rather in the Latin linguistic sense of “encompassing everything that is”. After all, did not God reveal His name as “I am who Am”? The statement of pure being is the name of God. Therefore, it is right to crown “He who comes in the Name of the Lord” as “King of all-that-has-being”. Now, our existence as human beings has both an intimate personal part as well as an outward public part. Thus, crowning Christ as King-of-all-that-is has to do with the depths of the human heart as well as the breadth of human relationships in society.

First, the personal – We are all called to have a personal relationship with the Lord. This invitation to a personal relationship with God who calls Himself “I Am” should blow our minds. The King of Everything-That-Is wants to know you personally and for you to know Him in the interior of your own heart! He is there by right, but the trouble is, we often rebel against His reign in our hearts – sometimes subtly, sometimes outright inimical to it. Sometimes we will only admit Him in with conditions, or on our own terms. We have a tendency to be egotistical and selfish and make everything about me, me, me. To claim Christ as King of All-That-Is, however, means it is all about Him, Him, Him, or if you like, through Him and with Him and in Him.

The Gospel for today gives us an insight into the various ways we respond to Christ’s Kingship in our hearts. In the characters of the story we see the diversity of reactions to this startling reality: Take first the crowd gathered around with the leaders of the people. They stood by and watched and sneered. Notice how selfish their mockery is, “He saved others, let him save *himself* if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God!” They can’t fathom someone willing to die for others, because their hearts were hardened into pure self-interest. Of course, this stems from the common misunderstanding among the Jews that the savior, the Messiah, the Christ, would be a temporal, worldly savior; that He would inaugurate a renewal of the Kingdom of Israel by overthrowing the Romans. How often do we misunderstand God’s plan in our own lives? How often have we had anger in our hearts that God didn’t slay this offender or the other? Why did He allow bad things to happen to good people? Why didn’t God do what I expected Him to do? This is a heart that does not crown Christ as King of All-That-Is, but rather sees Him as a personal mercenary.

The next is the mockery of the soldiers. Theirs is a mockery of pride and haughtiness. These were Roman soldiers, members of the Empire that ruled the world. They were looking down their noses at Jesus just like a bully would. Their subjugation of the Jewish people was a source of pride, and they were mocking this so-called ‘King’ because of the superiority they felt over them. To these soldiers, Jesus was just another in the long list of Kings that had been conquered by Roman might. And so, their mockery was self-centered and self-aggrandizing pride. How often have we had pride in our own accomplishments and maybe even looked down on others? How often have we despised the lowly and the poor and mocked them with our sense of superiority? How often have we feigned religious sentiment or belief in God but really seen ourselves as God? This is a heart that does not crown Christ as King of All-That-Is, but rather dismisses Him as a nobody.

Thirdly, we see the bad thief reviling Jesus. His mockery was, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us.” But it was a biting remark, as if to say, “O, if only *I* were the Christ, see how *I* would wield this power to get me out of this predicament!” In his contempt that Jesus was not using His kingly power as *he* thought he should, he reviled Him. How often have we thought of God as just our own personal genie-in-a-bottle, simply there to answer the demands of our wishes? And we He doesn’t answer us as we want, we pout and insult. This is the heart that does not crown Christ as King of All-That-Is, but rather turns Him into a magic wand.

There is then, at last, the so-called good thief. He is humbled by his guilt and has nothing else to lose. But he also knows what he is not. “Have you no fear of God.” In other words, “I know that I am not God.” At this point, He acknowledges Jesus to be King by making a petition one would only make to a King, “Remember me when you



come into your Kingdom”. Here he is like the people who anointed David to be King. This is what Jesus wants from us, too: that we might each and every one of us anoint Him as King over our own hearts. Let God be God, not just a projection of our own selfish wants and desires. This is the attitude of the heart that crowns Christ as King of All-That-Is.

But there is more. Contrary to the errors of our day, faith and religion are not just private affairs. Though many claim a wall of separation between Church and State, there is no denying that, in the end, Christ is the King of all of these things too. We, as Catholics, firmly profess that there is also a social dimension to religion that transcends State authority. To understand this feast, we need look to the magisterium of the Pope who inaugurated it in 1925, Pope Pius XI. He was speaking to a world that had just undergone a major world war that had brought the old order of the Western World crumbling down. Monarchies and governments had been brought to ruin and new and evil worldly ideologies had crept in like Marxism, communism and socialism – that had as stated goals the elimination of religion and the elevation of the state authority to positions formerly conceded to Divine Law. To this the Pope said, “These manifold evils in the world were due to the fact that the majority of men had thrust Jesus Christ and his holy law out of their lives; [with the claim] that these had no place either in private affairs or in politics: ... as long as individuals and states refused to submit to the rule of our Savior, there would be no real hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations. Men must look for the peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ; ... In the Kingdom of Christ, that is, it seemed to Us that peace could not be more effectually restored nor fixed upon a firmer basis than through the restoration of the Empire of Our Lord.”

“If We ordain that the whole Catholic world shall revere Christ as King, We shall minister to the needs of the present day, and at the same time provide an excellent remedy for the plague which now infects society.... The empire of Christ over all nations was rejected. The right which the Church has from Christ himself, to teach mankind, to make laws, to govern peoples in all that pertains to their eternal salvation, that right was denied. Then gradually the religion of Christ came to be likened to false religions and to be placed ignominiously on the same level with them. It was then put under the power of the state and tolerated more or less at the whim of princes and rulers. Some men went even further and wished to set up in the place of God's religion a natural religion consisting in some instinctive affection of the heart. There were even some nations who thought they could dispense with God, and that their religion should consist in impiety and the neglect of God. The rebellion of individuals and states against the authority of Christ has produced deplorable consequences...”

What are those consequences? “...the seeds of discord sown far and wide; those bitter enmities and rivalries between nations, which still hinder so much the cause of peace; that insatiable greed which is so often hidden under a pretense of public spirit and patriotism, and gives rise to so many private quarrels; a blind and immoderate selfishness, making men seek nothing but their own comfort and advantage, and measure everything by these; no peace in the home, because men have forgotten or neglect their duty; the unity and stability of the family undermined; society, in a word, shaken to its foundations and on the way to ruin.” (Pius XI, Quas Primas).

These are the stated reasons why Pope Pius XI inaugurated this Feast of Christ the King. It is for us to act upon it. It is meant for us to subject each and every aspect of our lives to the King of All-That-Is, both our private interior life as well as our public life in society. He is the King of All Things. But the first and most important thing that needs to be conquered is our heart. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts. “Lift up your heads, O gates, be lifted, you ancient portals, that the King of Glory may enter!” (Psalm 24:7)