

Christ the King

Dearly beloved,

Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King, instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925. In fixing it as a yearly celebration in liturgical calendar, he explained his motivation in this way: "People are instructed in the truths of faith, and brought to appreciate the inner joys of religion far more effectually by the annual celebration of our sacred mysteries than by any official pronouncement of the teaching of the Church. The church's teaching affects the mind primarily; her feasts affect both mind and heart, and have a salutary effect upon the whole of man's nature." Thus does the liturgy affect us more than any other aspect of the Church's life, and why we must take the greatest care with its celebration.

Pope Pius wished to encourage the world to contemplate Christ as King in an era in which many nations were throwing off the yoke of Christ and in regions where Christ was still honored as Lord, nationalism was pitting Christian nation against Christian nation. By the celebration of this feast each year, he hoped to remind rulers and politicians that their power to govern comes from God and therefore must be exercised in accord with the divine plan for mankind, and to encourage citizens to be obedient to their governors because they share, by God's design, in Christ's rule of the world. He also desired that regions and nations should consider their unity in Christ first, and let that unity override the tendency to excesses in nationalism like needless hatred and war.

The honorable Pope's intentions for this feast have, in large measure, never been realized. The nearly one hundred years since the institution of this feast have not been happy years, but years filled with war on a global scale and whole governments consumed by hatred for Christ and His Church. This is not surprising, given that God's rule over humankind has always been difficult, with man often throwing off the divine yoke. We see it already in the Fall of our first parents; we see it in the first book of Samuel when the Israelites asked God to give them a king like all the other nations, when they were not supposed to be like other nations, but have God as their king. We see it in Herod's alarm and hatred in the face of the Magi's announcement of the birth of the King of the Jews; we see it in the Jewish rejection of that King, remarking to Pilate that they have no king but Caesar.

And yet just because God's kingship over men has never been all that successful, with Christ, it still can be. We are not to simply give up now that the world seems to have reached an all-time low, an all-time separation from truth, a rejection not only of God, but also the way He has created man to be. If in the words of CS Lewis Christians never say goodbye, Christians also never give up. For whoever possesses Christ is the one who truly rules; in whomever He dwells there is power. The martyrs are proof of this, and they have brought down one unjust regime after another. Where is Nero? Conquered by Peter and Paul. Where is Decius? Conquered by Cyprian and Lawrence. Where is Queen Elizabeth? Conquered by Edmund Campion and Margaret Clitherow. Where is Hitler? Conquered by Maximilian Kolbe and Edith Stein. And these are just examples from Europe. What of Uganda and Japan, Mexico and the Soviet Union? In each place Christ conquered in the charity of His witnesses; in each place the blood of those who loved Him gave Him the victory.

Thus though it may be realistic to think we are in the end times, and the great apostasy is occurring, it does not change the way we live. As Christ says through the prophet Isaiah, "Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, by my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert." That is, things which appear to be prosperous and powerful are reduced to naught if they do not have Christ as a foundation. We belong to Christ, and therefore we triumph with Him; we know that He is King and if we act worthily, we will reign with Him forever. But He also has power to change things now, and we can be part of that if we believe.

There are a number of concrete things we can do to make the feast what Pius XI hoped it would be. On the political side, we should support candidates who live according to the truth and promote policies that protect the

family. Just as the world is changed by one person becoming more committed to Christ, so political strength and health depends principally upon the cell of society, the family, and so the protection and fostering of healthy, lifelong marriages for the raising of children should be our government's first aim. To govern according to the truth is to legislate to honor what man really is: a creature who finds his origin and finality in God and thus is capable of great good, but also a sinner who rebels and is often blind to what is good for him. And we also not place our hope in the princes of this world such that we trust in them more than God, for even we have received a sort of reprieve in this country, it is only a lesser evil. The great majority of our leaders are not motivated by Christ, but by partisan concerns that mimic the Gospel, and thus we must pray for them to be opened to the complete truth. For those whose political work is wholly motivated by Our Lord, they also deserve our prayers and support, perhaps more so, for they struggle daily in an environment hostile to truth and charity.

In the personal sphere, we can extend Christ's kingdom by inviting a person to the Church, that is, which is the kingdom of God on earth. Our Lord wishes that we should be instruments in His bringing souls to Himself, and this often happens in simple ways, like inviting someone to a solemn liturgy, or to a quality lecture, or to a sacred concert, or by reaching out to a person in a time of need or suffering. If we are sometimes unhappy, and we are Catholics, with the benefits of the sacraments and sound theology and philosophy, think of how unhappy souls must be who live their days outside the kingdom of Christ. Moreover, there are many who are baptized Catholic, but given the disarray of the past decades no longer practice the Faith, yet all they really need is an invitation from one of us to return to the Church, for they really desire to be close to Our Lord again but need some help in approaching Him. Beside the blood of the martyrs, Christ also conquers in our charity and our being willing to ask someone to share in the riches He has given us.

Lastly, we can become Saints and this happens by giving Christ everything, by letting Him rule, in the gracious way that He does, over each part of our lives. For some of the young men and women here, that means letting go of fear and answering the call to the religious life, to forsake marriage for the sake of Christ, to follow Him wherever He goes. There are certainly future priests and nuns in this church this morning. Do not let fear keep you from responding to Christ.

For others who have committed to a state in life, there is almost always a corner of our lives that we do not let Christ touch. The greatest hindrance to the growth of the kingdom of Christ is always our fear that if we give too much to Our Lord, He will not give in return, and so we hold something back, whether great or small. To each of us He says, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms,"--that is, offer me your fears and worldly attachments and I will give you far more than you gave to me. Do not fear that one who made the world cannot give you what your heart longs for.

And so as we prepare to receive this King into our hearts in Holy Communion, let us devote our lives to Him again, that He may rule in us and thus renew the world. Just as He has conquered fear in His Saints, may we let Him conquer fear in us today and thus continue to pray and act that His kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.