

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe | For Sunday, November 22, 2020

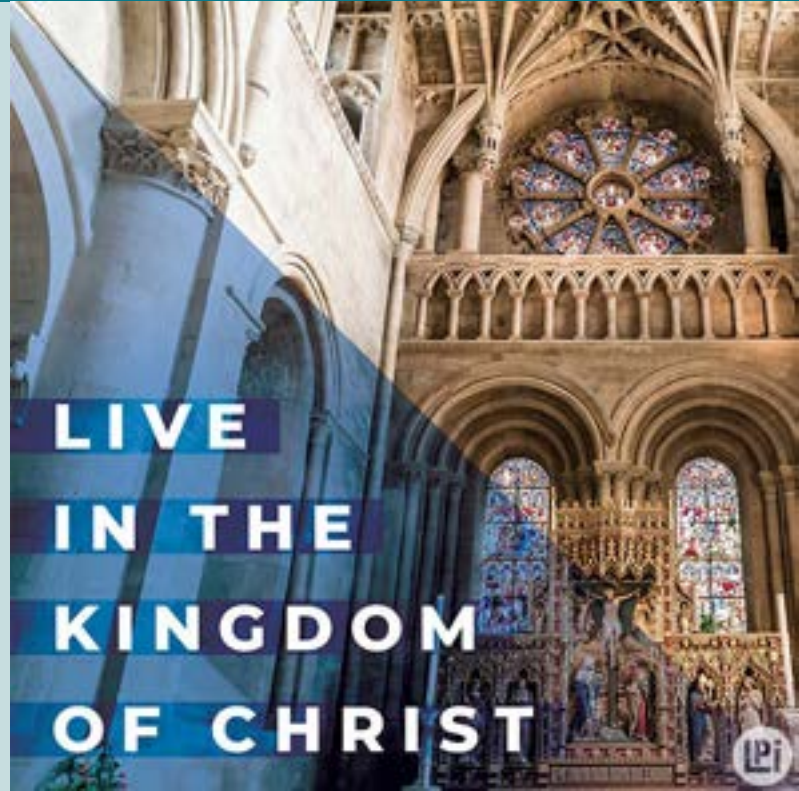
The Good News of the Reign of Christ

Written by Br. Silas Henderson, S.D.S.

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Matthew 25:31-46



“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him.” —Matthew 25:31-32a

Although the annual celebration of the Solemnity of “Christ the King” has been part of the life and prayer of the Catholic Church for nearly a century, I recall an opportunity I had a few years ago to experience this celebration in a very different context: with a Protestant community celebrating “Reign of Christ” Sunday. Their observance of this day offered a new perspective on this feast and what it might mean for us, particularly in these post-election days as our nation, communities, and families continue to experience division and unrest.

And so, to help us have a better sense of what this Sunday’s celebration is all about, I think it’s important for us to consider the history of the feast and the reasons that we have a special day dedicated to the Universal Sovereignty of Christ as part of our liturgical calendar.

When Pope Pius XI instituted a special feast honoring Christ “the King” in 1925, he was grieving for a world that had been ravaged by the First World War and which had begun to bow down before the “lords” of exploitative consumerism, nationalism, secularism, and new forms of injustice. The old power structures in Europe and the Middle East were fading into memory (including the colonial system that allowed European nations to claim lands in Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America). A new and uncertain world was rising in their place.

Pope Pius recognized that, for the Christian, those passing empires and colonies did not — could not — define who *or whose* they were. Instead, he reflected that the kingdom to which Christians belong is “spiritual and concerned with spiritual things... it demands of its subjects a spirit of detachment from riches and earthly things, and a spirit of gentleness. They must hunger and thirst after justice and more than this, they must deny themselves and carry the cross” ([from the Encyclical Quas primas, no. 15](#)). Pope Pius envisioned “a dominion by a King of Peace who came to reconcile all things, who came not to be served but to serve.” (no. 20) As the First Reading this Sunday reminds us, “As a shepherd tends his flock when he finds himself among his scattered sheep, so will I tend my sheep” ([Ezekiel 34:12](#)). What a comforting vision, as we grapple with the reality of violence and fear, along with questions about what we owe to those to those who are on the margins, as well as those who are the victims of terror and oppression.

While the image of the shepherd found in the readings for the Solemnity seems familiar to us, the notion of a “king” is fairly foreign to most people in our world today. In fact, there are fewer than 30 sovereign monarchs in the world today. And yet, in our parishes and religious communities, many of us will sing great hymns like “To Jesus Christ Our Sovereign King” and “Crown Him with Many Crowns.” By limiting the focus of this feast to the kingship of Christ, however, we risk losing the broader view of what we are really celebrating today: our citizenship in the Kingdom of God. And the message that we hear today is that we can no longer identify simply ourselves as “American,” “Navajo,” “Haitian,” “Italian,” “Sudanese,” or “Thai.” We have been claimed by and for Christ in our baptism and our true home is in the Reign of Christ — a reality that surpasses the limits of boundaries, ethnicities, politics, and even time itself. We are co-citizens of God’s Kingdom, with all the Communion of Saints.

PRAYER

A Prayer of Praise in Honor of Christ the King

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.
For you anointed your Only Begotten Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ, with the oil of gladness
as eternal Priest and King of all creation,
so that, by offering himself on the altar of the Cross
as a spotless sacrifice to bring us peace,
he might accomplish the mysteries of human
redemption
and, making all created things subject to his rule,
he might present to the immensity of your majesty
an eternal and universal kingdom
a kingdom of truth and life,
a kingdom of holiness and grace,
a kingdom of justice, love and peace.
And so, with Angels and Archangels,
with Thrones and Dominions,
and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven,
we sing the hymn of your glory.
Amen.

(taken from the Preface for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe in *The Roman Missal*)

In the end, this Sunday’s celebration of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe reminds us that the Kingdom of Christ isn’t some far off reality. We are living in that Kingdom now. And, as our Gospel reminds us, we are being called to demonstrate this through our care for the poor, the hungry, the outcast — all of those on the margins who take the place of Jesus in our world today. It is only by imitating the humility and compassion of our thorn-crowned King that we can help bring relief to those who suffer and God’s healing mercy to those who long for forgiveness, helping to proclaim the Good News of the Reign of Christ in the world today.

Br. Silas Henderson, S.D.S.