

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (Christ the King)

Sunday, November 20, 2016

Homily Helps and Intercessions

Background of the Feast of Christ the King

On the last Sunday of each liturgical year, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, or Christ the King.

Pope Pius XI instituted this feast in 1925 with his encyclical *Quas Primas* (“In the first”) to respond to growing nationalism and secularism. He recognized that these related societal ills would breed increasing hostility against the Church. Today reminds us that while governments and philosophies come and go, Christ reigns as King forever.

During the early twentieth century, in Mexico, Russia, and in many parts of Europe, atheistic regimes threatened not just the Catholic Church and its faithful but civilization itself. Pope Pius XI’s encyclical gave Catholics hope and—while governments around them crumbled—the assurance that Christ the King shall reign forever. Pope Pius XI said that Christ “reign[s] ‘in the hearts of men,’ both by reason of the keenness of his intellect and the extent of his knowledge, and also because he is very truth, and it is from him that truth must be obediently received by all mankind.”

Quas Primas continues to ring true. In recent years, aggressive secularist campaigns have sought to marginalize the Church and other religious institutions. In response to alienation and loss of solidarity – which tend to accompany these secularist assaults – nationalistic movements have sprung up across the western world. Now, as always, we must turn and gaze on the face of Christ, our merciful Lord.

Intercessions

V. For Pope Francis, our Bishop N., and all the ministers of the Church:

That their preaching and example may encourage the faithful
to stand firm as witnesses of Christ the King,

We pray to the Lord

R. Lord, hear our prayer

V. For all who serve in government:

That they be endowed with wisdom and prudence,
that their decisions will respect the rights of all people
and promote the common good.

We pray to the Lord.

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

V. For the ministries of the Church that show God’s mercy in the world,
especially the Catholic Campaign for Human Development:

That they would enjoy the freedom to heal the sick,

feed the hungry,
clothe the naked,
visit those in prison,
and build up the wellbeing of our communities.
We pray to the Lord.

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

V. For the poor, the sick, the elderly, and all vulnerable persons:
That they will find God's mercy through our service,
and that we will not shrink back from ministry to them,
in spite of whatever obstacles we may face.
We pray to the Lord.

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

V. For all our local Church communities,
That the Holy Spirit would fill us with courage to be steadfast in the face of today's
challenges,
and with charity to serve Christ, who reigns in love.
We pray to the Lord.

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

V. For the those who have lost their lives because of their faith:
May their souls rest in peace.
We pray to the Lord.

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

Homily Notes

First Reading

2 Samuel 5:1-3

In those days, all the tribes of Israel came to David in Hebron and said:

“Here we are, your bone and your flesh.

In days past, when Saul was our king,

it was you who led the Israelites out and brought them back.

And the LORD said to you,

‘You shall shepherd my people Israel

and shall be commander of Israel.’”

When all the elders of Israel came to David in Hebron,

King David made an agreement with them there before the LORD,
and they anointed him king of Israel.

- David's kingship points us to Christ's kingship, and it reveals the contrast between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of God. Saul pursues his own interests, while David rules according to God's will. The tribes come to David to anoint him their King. In the same way, Christ is the King of the New People of Israel. All people are invited to participate in his kingdom.

- [One important way that we, the Church in the United States, participate in Christ's kingdom of service is by caring for the poor. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development is the U.S. Bishops' program for addressing the root causes of poverty in our country. Over the course of 40 years, CCHD has funded nearly 8,000 projects that empower the poor to come together and solve community problems. CCHD funds projects that produce real and lasting change. Today, we will be taking the collection to fund this Campaign.]¹
- This is God's work of gathering his people: He uses his king as an instrument to draw the people who are scattered. God continues this work in the Church as he uses the instrument of his Church and her ministers to shepherd the flock.
- The people proclaim themselves as "your bone and your flesh"; their deepest identity is as David's kinsmen. This is true of all of us in Christ, as St. Paul says in the second reading: we are created in Christ and for Christ. We are "his bone and his flesh." Only in following him do we find authentic freedom.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5

R. (cf. 1) Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

I rejoiced because they said to me,

"We will go up to the house of the LORD."

And now we have set foot

within your gates, O Jerusalem.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Jerusalem, built as a city

with compact unity.

To it the tribes go up,

the tribes of the LORD.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

According to the decree for Israel,

to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

In it are set up judgment seats,

seats for the house of David.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

- The kingdom of Christ is not of the world; it is the heavenly Jerusalem. This psalm is our song in this valley of tears as we look forward to entering into the house of God.

Second Reading

Colossians 1:12-20

Brothers and sisters:

Let us give thanks to the Father,

who has made you fit to share

in the inheritance of the holy ones in light.

He delivered us from the power of darkness

¹ For dioceses/parishes that are participating in the CCHD collection this weekend.

and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,
in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation.
For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth,
the visible and the invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers;
all things were created through him and for him.
He is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.
He is the head of the body, the church.
He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
that in all things he himself might be preeminent.
For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,
and through him to reconcile all things for him,
making peace by the blood of his cross
through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven.

- St. Paul describes the effect of God’s merciful love for us in Christ. We were under the rule of the kingdom of evil and sin and have been “delivered . . . from the power of darkness” and made members of the Kingdom of his Son. The Jubilee Year of Mercy ends today, making it a fitting time to give thanks for the merciful love of the Father that has called us to share in his kingdom.
- We experience the newness of life that God’s mercy brings to us. It has a twofold effect of the “forgiveness of sins” and the elevation of creatures to share in the “fullness” that is present in Christ. We are conformed by God’s gracious mercy to the image of Christ the King and the center of creation.
- Pope Francis comments on this passage by saying:
Jesus is the center of creation; and so the attitude demanded of us as true believers is that of recognizing and accepting in our lives the centrality of Jesus Christ, in our thoughts, in our words and in our works. And so our thoughts will be *Christian* thoughts, thoughts of Christ. Our works will be *Christian* works, works of Christ; and our words will be *Christian* words, words of Christ. But when this center is lost, when it is replaced by something else, only harm can result for everything around us and for ourselves.²
- Christ is King of the entire universe because “in him were created all things in heaven and on earth...all things were created through him and for him.” As the Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et Spes* 22) taught, only in Christ is man’s true identity revealed. The Church (Pius XI, Encyclical *Quas Primas*) instituted this feast day in 1925 to remind an increasingly secular world that only by acknowledging our origin and end in Christ will human individuals and societies find peace, justice, freedom, and

² Homily on Solemnity of Christ the King, November 24, 2013, © 2013 Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission. Available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20131124_conclusione-annus-fidei.html.

happiness. Christ is the authentic measure of all creation, including governments, states, and societies.

- The Saints are great witnesses to the primacy of Christ in the face of government encroachment. St. Thomas Becket, St. Thomas More, and especially Blessed Miguel Pro, who died, arms outstretched, crying “Viva Cristo Rey,” all witnessed to the centrality of Christ in society to the point of shedding blood.

Gospel

Luke 23:35-43

The rulers sneered at Jesus and said,

“He saved others, let him save himself
if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God.”

Even the soldiers jeered at him.

As they approached to offer him wine they called out,

“If you are King of the Jews, save yourself.”

Above him there was an inscription that read,

“This is the King of the Jews.”

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying,

“Are you not the Christ?

Save yourself and us.”

The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply,

“Have you no fear of God,
for you are subject to the same condemnation?

And indeed, we have been condemned justly,

for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes,
but this man has done nothing criminal.”

Then he said,

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

He replied to him,

“Amen, I say to you,

today you will be with me in Paradise.”

- Christ kingship is fully revealed by the cross. To the world, the cross is the domain of a criminal, but as Rupert of Deutz, a medieval Abbott, has called it, the cross of Christ is the “Throne of Love.” This is echoed by Pope Francis:
“The kingdoms of this world at times are sustained by arrogance, rivalries and oppression; the reign of Christ is a ‘kingdom of justice, love and peace.’ ...For a Christian, speaking of power and strength means referring to the power of the Cross, and the strength of Jesus’ love: a love which remains steadfast and complete, even when faced with rejection, and it is shown as the fulfillment of a life expended in the total surrender of oneself for the benefit of humanity.”³

³ Angelus Address, Solemnity of Christ the King, November 22, 2015, © 2015 Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission. Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2015/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20151122.html.

His kingdom's only force is the power of the love of Christ that draws all things to himself. The Kingdom of Christ is not spread by force. The Church does not impose the Gospel on anyone, but we propose it to all, inviting them by the love of Christ to experience the fullness of life as his subjects. He brings us true freedom to love by sharing his love with us.

- The kingdom of God changes the status of all human kingdoms. When Christians proclaim Christ as Lord, no other lord can claim their undivided loyalty. Only to Jesus Christ do we give complete fidelity.
- Christ is a different and new kind of king. We normally think of kings as covered in jewels and fine clothes. We imagine them followed by a great entourage. Christ the King is stripped, beaten, and crowned not with jewels and gold, but with thorns. His only attendants are his sorrowing Mother, his young friend, and a few women devoted to him. Christ teaches us that his kingdom belongs not to those who seem to have power in this world, but to the poor and humble who embrace the cross. It is when we walk with Jesus and when we unite any of our suffering to his that we come to experience his glory and life in resurrection.
- St. Dismas, the good thief who was crucified with Jesus, teaches us that no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy. It is never too late to turn to Christ and ask for your sins to be forgiven. The Jubilee Year of Mercy has been a chance to emphasize and rediscover the power of God's mercy to turn sinners into saints. It reminded us of the need to trust more deeply in God's love for us and to turn more often to receive it. As priests, we experience the way in which God's mercy can draw people back to him, even at the end of their lives. It is not uncommon to offer the sacraments of Penance and Anointing of the Sick to people near the end of their lives. The mercy of Christ the King reaches out to them in their last moments, and they can hear the words that St. Dismas heard: "this day you will be with me in in paradise."
 - This Solemnity is a chance to remind our parishioners to invite a priest to visit any among their family and friends who are sick or dying and bring them the mercy of God at the end of their lives.
 - A personal anecdote or story – such as the account of Lord Marchmain from Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* – can help make this point.

Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States, second typical edition, Copyright © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine; Psalm refrain © 1968, 1981, 1997, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. Used with permission.

Copyright © 2016, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved.