

Solemnity of Christ the King

November 26, 2023

As waves of nationalism and secularism were on the rise across the globe, Pope Pius XI instituted the Solemnity of Christ the King in 1925 as a reminder that Christ reigns above all earthly rulers. While temporal powers will fade away, Christ's reign and his kingdom remain eternal. This day reminds you and me to totally surrender our wills and hearts to Christ's sovereignty in our lives.

Welcome to the Church's New Year's Eve, the last Sunday before we hit a kind of re-set button and start the journey over once again, a journey across different Church seasons, a journey through much of salvation history, through the ups and downs of the Jewish people and the prophets, the ups and downs of the life of Jesus, the ups and downs of the disciples and the early Church. It will all be on display for us once again, this time with St. Mark as our guide.

But unlike the secular New Year's Eve, this one isn't one of celebration. Rather, it's one of reflection, of contemplation, of evaluation, of looking back and assessing how we are doing as disciples. Was it a good year for you? Is your relationship with God on solid ground? Do you feel closer to him, more committed to him, more in love with him? I, of course, can't answer those questions for you. Only you can. The important thing is to answer them honestly and humbly.

For many of us, there isn't a simple answer. Our lives, like nearly everyone who has come before us, are a mixture of many things - some good and some not so good. Some days we probably went to bed feeling good about ourselves, good about the choices we made that day. Some other days we might have gone to bed wondering and lamenting, "Why in the world did I do that? Why in the world did I say that? What was I thinking?" And all of that is okay, normal, and expected. We are not perfect, so we probably shouldn't and can't expect perfection.

I guess our answer depends on what sort of standard we are measuring ourselves against, what sort of bar we are setting for ourselves. If we are using mediocrity as the standard and thereby setting the bar extremely low, we probably feel pretty good about ourselves. I, myself, can fall into that trap. “Well, I’m not in jail. I haven’t committed any major crimes. I haven’t destroyed anyone’s life. I haven’t left a trail of destruction in my path. So I guess I’m doing okay!” And if I could reach out, I’d probably pat myself on the back.

But then we are faced with what we are celebrating today, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King. Calling Christ our “king” probably doesn’t make as much sense as it did long ago, and doesn’t carry with it an obvious meaning. After all, very few “kings” remain, and we in this country take pride in not having one. Yet, there is probably one word we could use that sort of captures the essence of this day more plainly for us, more effectively, more completely. And it’s probably not a word you are thinking of. You see, by calling Jesus by this title, by celebrating Christ the King, what we are really celebrating is

Christ Our Everything.

And by that measure - well, I’m really not doing very well at all.

Oh, he’s my some-thing. When I need something. When the choice I need to make is easy. When the person I’m asked to love is extremely lovable. When I just want to give a little, from my leftovers, my “extras”. When the wrong I’m asked to forgive is small. When my relationships are going well. When I am healthy. When I like my coworkers and my bosses and my neighbors. This is the God I can get on-board with.

But some of those other times - the times when doing the right thing is hard, the times when I’m faced with real challenges and disappointments, the times when a choice I need to make is difficult - well, I’m not sure he’s even in the picture anymore, not really on my radar. In those times, doing what works for me seems a lot easier.

Being “all-in” is not easy. It’s probably one of the reasons that when we read about the Saints we sometimes think to ourselves, “I could never do that in a million years.” They just seem to have been so incredibly committed. So much on fire. So tireless. So unwilling to ever count the cost. So unwilling to make excuses and rationalizations. Rather, each in his or her own way seems to have truly been in love with Jesus, and wanted nothing more than to please him, to serve him, to listen to him and follow wherever he chose to lead them. Yes, I guess you could say that, for the Saints, Jesus really was their everything. And the difference they made in this world, the love they showed - is the reason we are still talking about them years (and in most cases, centuries) later.

Who is Jesus for you?

Is he our Lord - the One who gets to call the shots in our lives? Is he our Savior - the One who brings us back into the fold every time we have strayed? Is he our Refuge - the One whose arms are the safest place to be? Is he our Brother - the One we can count on? Is he our Friend - the One who knows and understands us better than any other? Is he our King - the One who reigns in our lives, in our minds and in our hearts?

Is Christ Our Everything?

If not, then let’s spend the coming year growing closer to, trusting more deeply in, living more faithfully for, and surrendering more completely to him. Anything else will make it impossible to fully experience the things that really matter.

Long live the King! Long live Christ Our Everything!

Short Story:

“I die the king’s good servant, but God’s first.” St. Thomas More is the patron saint of politicians. He was a brilliant lawyer and diplomat in 16th

century England. His patriotism and loyalty to the throne attracted the attention of King Henry VIII who made him Lord Chancellor of England.

What Henry VIII did not know was that Thomas More's first loyalty was to Christ, the King of kings. When Henry VIII, decided to divorce his wife Catherine of Aragon, marry Anne Boleyn, and make himself head of the Church of England, More knew this was not right.

Rather than approve what he believed to be against the Divine will, he resigned from his prestigious and wealthy position as Lord Chancellor and lived with his family a life of poverty. Since he would not give his support to the king, the King had More arrested, convicted of treason, imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1534 and beheaded in July 1535.

On his way to public execution, More encouraged the people to remain steadfast in the Faith. His last recorded words were: "I die the king's good servant, but God's first." — For More, it was not simply enough to confess Christ privately in the safety of one's heart and home; one must also confess him in one's business and professional life as well as in the laws and policies that govern society.