

Solemnity of Christ the King - Christ's Kingdom Is not of This World

November 21, 2021.

Earthly kings rule from palaces, Christ the King reigns from the cross. In this Sunday's Gospel reading (John 18:33b-37), **Jesus affirms that he is a king, but he also affirms that his kingdom does not "belong to this world."** Jesus stood before Pilate and said, "My Kingdom is not of this world." Pilate couldn't understand Him. He didn't want to understand Him. But we want to understand Him. We want an end to starvation, cruelty, drug epidemic, sex trafficking, violence and all the horrors of our society. We want Jesus! **If Jesus is not a political king, what kind of king is he? If his kingdom is "not of this world," what kind of kingdom is it?**

The Solemnity of Christ the King is an occasion for us every year to recalibrate our lives to the reality of Christ's kingdom and to follow the criteria Christ gives us to enter it, live it and proclaim it. It provides a much-needed corrective against the perennial temptation to view the world through the lens of earthly power and squeeze our understanding of God into that prism. This was happening in 1925, when Pope Pius XI established the solemnity. There was a militant atheism — the most notorious examples were in Russia and Mexico, seeking to repress belief in Christ and suppress Christian presence in the world. There was, moreover, a much larger secularizing trend attempting to order life without reference to God and make faith exclusively private. Then there were the fascist movements keen to use the Church for political ends. **All these were trying to make the state or political leaders the object of faith, hope and love, and supplant Christian works of mercy with the corruption of the state. This flattening of faith is still happening today in other forms. Many, for example, spend more time thinking about who's in charge in Washington or Beijing, or Moscow or Havana than who's in charge of the universe.**

At his Angelus on the Solemnity of Christ the King in 2006 Benedict XVI explained the answers to these questions: **"[Jesus] did not come to rule over peoples and territories, but to set people free from the slavery of sin and to reconcile them with God."** Ever since original sin, this fallen world has been enslaved to selfishness and separated from God. Tempted by the devil, our first parents believed the lie that they could achieve the fulfillment, meaning, and happiness they longed for apart from God which led them to disobey God's commands, to act as if they themselves were gods. **That self-centred rebellion, instead of liberating the human race, poisoned it with suffering, death, and evil. By throwing off God's rule, we made ourselves into followers of the devil against God.** Jesus came to save us, by bringing the light of truth back into our darkened, confused world, the truth that will set us free from sin. God is love. **By accepting God's love in our life, we accept the antidote to the poison and are reinstated as citizens of the Kingdom of God, where Christ is the everlasting King.** The way to reach this goal is long and there is no short cuts. He is Love and Truth which are never imposed: **they come knocking at the doors of the heart and the mind and where they can enter they bring peace and joy. This is how God reigns; this is his project of salvation, a "mystery" in the biblical sense of the word: a plan that is gradually revealed in history.**

The freedom of Christ's Kingdom is an interior freedom, a peace and strength of soul that only his grace can give us. If up to now we haven't experienced it as deeply as we would like, maybe that's because we haven't fully accepted this truth, that God is love. Fully accepting that truth, which Pilate refused to do, involves at least three things. First, it means accepting it freshly every single day. Each day we remain free to decide how we will live. And so, each day we have to reaffirm our citizenship in his Kingdom, or else we will slowly

drift away from him. Second, accepting the truth that God is love means admitting that we need God. If we try to achieve perfect happiness by our own efforts, we will shut ourselves off from God's love. The most direct way to admit that we need God, to allow his love to be a part of our lives, is to come regularly to the sacrament of reconciliation. There is simply no better way to acknowledge his Kingship over our lives, and to acknowledge that the law of his Kingdom is mercy. Third, **accepting the truth that God is love means striving in our daily lives to love as God loves.**

There are also three ways to understand the word "truth." And the fundamental truth that "God is love" fits into all three. First, **truth can refer to facts, to the way things are.** Jesus on the cross with his unstoppable mercy and his total self-sacrifice bears witness to the fact that God is primarily love, self-giving and goodness. Second, **truth can refer to morality, to the right way of behaving.** In this sense, ***Jesus on the cross bears witness to the real standard of our moral choices – not personal comfort, self-indulgence, or individual opinion, but following God's will. As St Paul explained, Jesus was glorified because he was "obedient unto death, death on a cross" (Phil 2:8).*** Jesus' death on the cross is our signpost to heaven and the road to be followed if we are to make sense of our lives and open up the vision of a new world. Obedience to God's will, to his commandments, is the source of our spiritual health and fruitfulness; it is how we enter into a loving relationship with him. Disobeying God's commands is self-destructive, as if a tree were to uproot itself from the soil in order to be "more free." Certainly it would be free from the soil, but it would no longer be free to grow and flourish. Third, **truth refers to dependability, trustworthiness.** When we say a friend is true, we mean we can count on them. **Jesus on the cross proves without any doubt that God is trustworthy. God is so faithful that he didn't abandon us even when we refused to believe in him and actively tried to destroy him. God is love – it's a fact, a moral standard, and an invitation to trust. That's the truth that will set us free from sin and lead us into the eternal Kingdom, if we accept it.**

Yes, brothers and sisters, the Second Coming signals the end of the world as we know it. **But the Son of Man is coming on the clouds of heaven even now, in the life of the Church. The kingship of Christ is made real by allowing God to do his work in us and through us. It is a life-long process involving a daily invitation to conversion.** We ought to be preparing our lives for this by calling upon his daily graces, ready to receive him whenever he comes. The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes this powerful reality: The Church devotes paragraphs #675 to 679 of the Catechism to answer the questions of the End Times. ***"Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh."*** (CCC 675). **God bless, Amen.**