

The Solemnity of Christ the King - What does “King” mean to you?

By Deacon Raymond Chan, November 24, 2019

The King. Christ: the King. The feast of Christ the King. This is what we celebrate this Sunday but what does it mean? We mark it on our calendars and in our liturgical celebrations every year on the last Sunday of ordinary time. Some people celebrate it as a sort of “New Year’s Eve,” marking the last Sunday of the church year before we roll over into Advent and the beginning of a new liturgical year.

It’s fine for the British to hail baby George (son of Duchess Catherine and William of Wales, third in line for the English throne) as their future king. But in North America, our experience doesn’t include kings – at least not of the political sort. When talking about “King.,” especially for our age, who doesn’t think of Elvis, the King of Rock’n ’Roll? Or what about Michael Jackson, crowned the King of Pop? Or Wayne Gretzky, King in hockey, Burger King in fast food chain, Lion King in movies, chicken a la king in recipes, and of course king ribs, king crab, to signify popularity, luxury, size. Now the notion of “king” is no longer the most effective, evocative of titles. It “*mirrors a current preoccupation with money, power and fame.*”

In the 1920’s, to counter a sense of growing secularism when Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin were rising to power, Pope Pius XI declared that there should be a celebration of the reign of Christ and focus on his message of peace marked by a special occasion set aside proclaiming Christ as King. Anglicans followed suit. Other churches have done similar things in marking and keeping this observance, with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden perhaps being most honest about it. They refer to it as the *Sunday of Doom* in between the turkey of our Thanksgiving feast and the twinkling Christmas lights, reading a gospel lesson about the crucifixion of Jesus. Doesn’t “Sunday of Doom” sound about right? So what does all this tell us about ourselves, or about the Christ we celebrate as King on this day?

So how can we know Jesus as King? While most monarchies of the past were either associated with tyranny or sentimental images and they ruled from palaces, Christ the King commands from the cross. His kingdom is not a place, but a people who give their hearts, and sometimes even their lives, by doing his will. It is not about conquests of land but salvation of souls that Jesus came. The crown he wore is made with thorns but the reign he won for us is eternal life with God. Paul’s Letter to the Colossians (1:12-20) offers a balance: “***May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.***”

The answer can only be found in our hearts and minds. For many, the notion of kingship may be so restrictive that it has no power and is meaningless in our own age. Some people may still cherish the notion of Christ the KING for sentimental reasons. Others will be tempted to triumphalism. And still others will be caught up in the pain of fatalism. The **Holy Eucharist is the best way to look for the meaning of Christ the King.** In the context of the Eucharist, the personal experience of Jesus can be intensely private, personal, and deeply felt. Christians often leave the Eucharist with calm souls. If we grew up in the Catholic Church, this way of worship is what we may remember most vividly from childhood. If we came into the Catholic Church as young adults or adults, it may be the experience of meeting Christ in the Eucharist that first drew us to the sacramental life of the church. This is **an authentic way to know Christ the King.** As St. Thomas Aquinas said, “***The Eucharist is the sacrament of love. It signifies love, it produces love.***” Christ’s kingship rests on the authority of complete, sacrificial, never-ending, and all-encompassing love.

That's the point of the Feast of Christ the King: to remind us that we are all children of God in his Kingdom. To challenge us to gird ourselves for whatever will come, whether the Day of Doom or Christ's return in glory. To give praise and thanks and glory to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. 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 daily conversion. He calls us to abandon shortcuts in our daily dealings with others, our selfishness, hatred and injustice, to give way to Christlike attitudes of selflessness, forgiveness and mercy. He calls us, his subjects, to take his side in the struggle of furthering the growth of his kingdom. Again, from Colossians: ***"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."*** We talk a lot about kings, name many things with this title, but in the end, there is only one who matters for our life in this world and the next: **Christ the King.**