

THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

aka Christ the King Sunday

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On this last Sunday of the Church Year, the solemnity of Christ the King will be contrasted and compared around the United States, and even around the world, and so much across the breadth of the entire Body of Christ. Because we have in mind so many shootings and massacres, and wonder deeply -- or perhaps set wonder aside because it is too hard to conceive -- how is it that we Christians can indeed celebrate the Truth that Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But then, that is the point: there is a King, His name is Jesus, we belong to him, and despite all that swirls around us, we continue to proclaim his name, scars and all.

May your Word be spoken, your Word be heard, your glory be revealed, your name lifted up and praised, O God of heaven and earth. Amen.

You will hear today some War time imagery and anecdotes; it is often at war we sense more than ever power and authority, bravery and dedication, perseverance and hope, and lines drawn in the sand. These are also often associated with the nature of rulers, whether war mongers or defenders; we rarely define kingship in terms of peaceableness, unless we can directly and constantly attribute any peace we have to that ruler to whom we bow.

Christians have also known, from the very beginning of their faith from Calvary, and even BEFORE Calvary, that their kingdom, when the Messiah comes to usher in a new heaven and earth, is ultimately yet to come. We certainly are also called to work and pray and give for God's Kingdom to be RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW. So, our fight is going to be one of those very attributes I mentioned. And so often, drawing the line in the soil, and perseverance in faith, love and power: God's own attributes are the same as our King and Savior.

The entire modern notion of today's liturgical focus -- I say modern, comparatively speaking -- comes to us from the reigning Roman Catholic Pope in 1925. World War I was over, or at least the shelling. Then came several presumptuous leaders to fill power vacuums, amassing power, and who would eventually pull the pin on World War II. In the face of the alarming ascendancies of this batch of rulers, in 1925 the Pope declared a solemnity to proclaim no other King but Jesus Christ. The solemnity of Christ the King; completed by the imagery of the crucifix we call a Christus Rex. Christ with a crown and most often in vestments, but on a cross, but with no nails, and with the holes and the scars of his crucifixion. Risen, but marked. The Victorious King, bearing with him the consequences of his ministry of salvation for us. You can see such a cross at the votive stand at the west end, in the narthex.

The Pope, as risky as it was in Italy at that time, proclaimed a drawn line in the dirt, and said, "We have no king but Jesus." That is, we have a king, and his name is Jesus.

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I am going to repeat the first part of that phrase several times during this sermon, We Have a King, and I would like to invite you to respond out loud, the second part, “His Name is Jesus.” So, every time you hear me say, “We have a King”, you say”**His Name is Jesus.**”

Just as important, the Pope wasn't saying that HE was a king or the king. He was doing what we are all called to do, and so very, very, many leaders of the Body of Christ through the centuries have also done in situations where an earthly leader demands or manipulates obeisance and oblation, such as in times of war or leading up to war, and that is to POINT to the ONE who IS the King of Kings and lord of Lords.

And so there it is, “**We have a king**” [*His name is Jesus*]

....Not a king in some sort of metaphorical or imaginary way, but One who rules over everything seen and unseen—who created it and sustains it with His gracious love.

We have a king, [*His name is Jesus*]

...who being God exercises the office of monarchy more fully, completely and perfectly than we could imagine possible. This is no constitutional monarchy, where the king rules at the pleasure of His subjects, His authority limited by the whims of the subjects. No, this is an absolute monarchy—He alone defines the terms of His rule, what it means for Him to be king and we to be His people.

We have a king, [**His Name is Jesus**]

....and this king is so powerful that he can come to us as the most weak and vulnerable, an infant, born in humble circumstances and can die as the lowest of society, hung on the tree of the cross—yet in neither of these is his glory, majesty and authority compromised or even threatened.

As Christians we already know we ain't perfect, and the world ain't fair. Right?

The collect for today prays, “Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under the King of kings’ his most gracious rule.” We cannot escape the awareness that this collect reminds us, that we are divided and enslaved by sin. None of us are exempt from our own complicit responsibility for the world we live in. None of us can honestly claim we bear no responsibility for the sad divisions in our nation, or in our communities or even in our congregations. Our dishonesty in pointing the finger at others is graphically described by someone who said, “if you point your finger at someone else, there are three pointed toward you.”

So, how do we move forward with the banner of Christ as our King in a world that still seems to shout: “We have no king but the Emperor”?

The Gospel provides us with some direction. The short conversation between Jesus and Pilate, as crisp and pointed and tense though it may be, illustrates the clashing of worldly and spiritual kingship. One is the threat of raw and absolute power with which we are all too familiar and to which we are often subjected. It is the power that has called us to war as a legitimate, but

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seldom necessary, solution. The other is a power that comes from disavowing the power of strength and might and turning to the power of love and redemption. Although the Church has decided over many centuries that war is often inevitable, the two are not compatible. We have to decide so often, even in everyday life, which we uphold.

We have a King [*His name is Jesus*]

...a king who came not to serve Himself and His own self-centered desires, but to serve us, through His life, death and resurrection, demonstrating clearly for all who would see that by His own death He has conquered death, and in His grace has won for all who would believe and receive the promise of eternal life.

Another topic in the Gospel is one very much at the center of our politics and culture today, and that is truth. Jesus tells us he came into the world to testify to the truth. "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." There is no lie here; there is no shading or twisting of fact. The truth is that God loves the world, all of it, and gave his only Son to redeem it from sin and death.

My father got stationed as an Army Chaplain to Germany for three years when I was in high school. The family took a two week drive through England, and made a point of stopping at Coventry Cathedral. For me it was indelible impression.

The Nazis firebombed the industrial city of Coventry in England during World War II. The ancient cathedral was destroyed when the fire melted the lead on the roof and caused the building to collapse.

Last week's emailed reflection on the gospel had attached to it an iconic photo of a liturgical procession of choir and clergy in the destroyed, hollowed out Cathedral. The photo is all about perseverance to continue to proclaim Jesus. No matter what.

After the war, a modern cathedral was rebuilt on the site. If you've been there, you know that adjacent to it are the ruins of an apse in which an altar stands with a charred cross, and behind it on the wall are the words "Father, forgive." And attached to the new outside wall, is a huge bronze depiction of Michael the Archangel with spear in hand defeating the Enemy Lucifer. This place is a stark experience of the two opposing earthly powers of war and forgiveness, without losing track of God's own Kingdom to be brought to bear. There is a war; there are opposing Kingdoms; you can't walk up to the Cathedral church of St Michael without bearing this in mind. But for now, the Cathedral became a shrine for the hope of redemption in THIS world where, also, Christ in Glory is depicted above the high altar, because He is the Lord of Lords, then, now and always.

Images like this, like memorized Bible verses, can help us in a time of discomfort and dread and need of consolation about what is happening. Jesus said, "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

And so we are reminded by the Christ himself that to belong to the truth means listening to his voice, which may mean tuning out the voices of others claiming to have the truth.

So, how do we live in this time as citizens of the Kingdom of Christ?

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First and foremost, we constantly speak forth, in every part of our lives, no ground left unturned, the first Creed of the Church, Jesus Is Lord.

We have a king [*His name is Jesus*]

- As well, we live as people of the truth, meaning we offer ourselves as ambassadors of the Good News to everyone. This does not happen by a sheer act of will. It happens by cultivating our attitudes and behavior through regular worship, the reading and study of Scripture, and our prayers. The more we feed from these sources, the more truthful our lives become, and less vulnerable to falsehood.
- Too, we live as servants of Christ the King. That means we find ways to serve him by serving others both within and without our faith community. If we think we can't do that because of our limitations or fears, then we need to ask Jesus to show us what we can do. These actions replenish our depleted resolve and strengthen us for living in a chaotic world.
- More so, we live as a people who see opportunity in the community of others. First in the body of Christ, our fellow believers. And then embracing the stranger, the refugee and the homeless, those who have no helper. Just singling out one person in these categories and finding ways to help them are ways to honor Christ the King.
- Looking up from our present circumstances, we live as a people who hope in the life of the world to come. This right here surely is God's creation, given to us for our joy and benefit. But we know it is not where we are eventually going to be by God's grace and mercy. Our hearts are restless as we await what is to come.

And next Sunday, that becomes our song in anticipation and expectation, O come, O come, Emmanuel.

Today, we praise his name, we remember his mighty works and his promises of what is to come; we offer our lives and especially the labor of our lives on this Ingathering Sunday, to this king and his kingdom for more and more disciples to utter our same words of acclamation.

We have a king [*His name is Jesus*]

...who by his life, death and resurrection, through His word, sacraments and abiding presence provides us with all we need to live the faithful lives to which he called us.

As we honor Christ the King today, remember that Jesus is relying on us to be partners with him in bringing the truth to a world that tries to shut it out, but desperately needs to hear it and embrace it.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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