

Christ the King

I take as my text from St. John's Gospel:

*Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king.
To this end was I born, and for this cause
came I into the world, that I should bear
witness unto the truth.*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always
acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord my Strength and my Redeemer.*

Today, we celebrate the *Feast of Christ the King*, which focuses more clearly on that essential nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, that of **King**, the sovereign Lord of all.

This **Kingship** is based on the hypostatic union, that is Jesus Christ, the **Word of God**, as consubstantial with the Father and having all things in common. Thus, Christ, as stated by **Cyril of Alexandria**, *has necessarily supreme and absolute dominion over all things created.*

Furthermore, Christ has purchased us by the supreme sacrifice on the **Cross** and he thus owns us, and we are subject to him for we, our bodies, are now *members of Christ*.

God has bestowed upon Christ dominion over all things created as Jesus, quoted in Matthew 28:18, said: *All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

So, we, turning now to the celebration of this **Feast of Christ the King**, discover that the propers, Collect, Epistle and Gospel, are *not* found in the **1928 Book of Common Prayer**. The reason is that the festival was not instituted in the Western Church until 1925, just about the same time the *1928 Book of Prayer Book* was going into print, though they were included in the Altar Missal which was printed some time later.

Its late institution as a *Feast of the Church* did not preclude its acceptance by the *Anglican Communion*, including the Episcopal Church, and its celebration in the Western Church was designated by the Pope as the last Sunday in October, in proximity to the eve of the *Festival of All Saints*. The *Anglican Communion* aligned with the Roman Church on the importance of having a *Feast of Christ the King* and quickly adopted it.

With that, we turn to the Gospel passage from St. John, recounting our Lord's trial before Pilate, where Jesus affirms that he is a King, and sets forth the nature of his Kingdom. He confirms his pre-existence and the purpose of his incarnation.

Moreover, it is to a *truth* that he bears witness. But what is *truth*? For Pilate, it was more of a rhetorical question; however, for the Christian, *truth* has a more complex and spiritual meaning.

In a Hellenistic world, that is, a world that had embraced Greek thinking, Jesus' claim to bear witness to the *Truth* would only bring to mind, among such as Pilate, a myriad of interpretations of what *truth* is.

I dare say that, today, such a claim to the *truth* would be received with equal disdain.

But, for the moment, let us focus on the words of Christ as St. John recounts them in his Gospel.

In answering Pilate to the charge, the accusation that he is a king, Jesus replies: *Thou sayest that I am a king.*

This is a form of expression meaning, essentially, *yes*; thus, he admits to the accusation. But our Lord had already qualified the nature of his Kingdom when he said: *My kingdom is not of this world...*

At his trial before Pilate, Jesus took on the role of witness.

In his Epistle to Timothy, in the sixth chapter, St. Paul talks about the witness of Jesus Christ, *who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession...* in that he gave his evidence as a witness to the Kingdom of God.

Christ bore witness before Pilate: he bore witness of the **Truth**. In the fullest sense, he bore witness of his **Nature**, of his **Purpose**, of his **Kingship**, and of those who were his subjects.

It is important that we understand that the *Kingdom of God* is not a golden age at some future time on this earth. Such a belief is supported neither by Scripture nor by tradition. Our Lord clearly stated that: *My kingdom is not of this world...*

On his ascension into heaven, Christ sat down at the **Right Hand** of God, the victorious **King**, having conquered death and Satan.

We could easily embark on a deep, intense theological discussion at this point; however, our focus might best be on what the *Feast of Christ the King* means to us today, and what is that **truth**.

Foremost, Christ is **Truth**. God is **Truth**. The Gospel is **Truth**. The Holy Spirit is **Truth**.

And the *Feast of Christ the King* reminds us that Jesus Christ is the Lord of our hearts. His *Truth* dwells within our hearts, and there he is King; therein, we owe him our allegiance.

His *Power* to convert the heart, in guiding, leading, and sanctifying us, is exercised through the *Truth* as revealed in his Gospel. We are not forced or compelled to be Christians; it is our choice.

As Jesus Christ witnessed before Pilate, so, in yielding ourselves to him, we become witnesses before the world to the *Truth*, the *Gospel of Jesus Christ*. We acknowledge that he **is Truth**.

We take up the *Banner of Christ the King*, and just as St. Paul carried that *Banner* throughout the Roman world; just as the Apostles, and the Saints that followed, bare witness under that *Banner*; so, we, too, follow in their footsteps. We witness to the *Truth* revealed in **Christ the King**.

Our witness in the world is a continuing struggle. The world is ever changing, ever encroaching on our Christian life, because so much of mankind will not accept the Gospel and its demands.

God is unchanging, while the world is ever changing, and the Church is under constant attack to conform to the world; in effect, the Church is continually being pressured to redefine the *Truth* once revealed in the Gospel, and to accede to the demands of society.

These pressures have become more and more blatant, yet, in many ways they are also subtle and deceptive, invasive, pervasive, and dividing. A Church divided, indeed a Parish divided, is in peril of floundering in a sea of discontent.

In our liturgy, in our *Prayer Book*, and in our *Catholic Doctrine*, we are ever reminded of the *Unity of the Trinity: God is One*. This *Doctrine of the Trinity* is a cornerstone of our **Christian Faith** — the incomprehensibility of a *Triune God*, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — from which follows that the *Church is One*, and when we accept the gift of **Grace** and the **Love of God**, we become at one with him.

At one — think also of the word *atonement* associated with the *atoning* for our sins whereby we become *at one* with God as he forgives us, a spiritual oneness.

Thus, in celebrating the **Feast of Christ the King**, we recognize the immutable *Truth* of the Gospel and our call to bear witness to the *Truth* as revealed in the *Gospel*, just as our Lord bore witness before Pilate, and just as those thousands of Saints who followed bore witness over the centuries.

When we acknowledge **Christ as King**, we yield ourselves over to his Sovereignty, where he rules our hearts with his captivating power.

In Jesus Christ we see the perfect revelation of the Godhead, and the perfect revelation of true humanity; we see God's creative power and perfect love; we see the reality of full salvation for all of creation.

For all the earthly kings and sovereigns, they are but temporal entities whose power is limited; who pass away as the flowers of the field; while, in *Truth*, the *Kingdom of God* is **eternal**.

Christ is King, sovereign Lord of all; but his Kingdom is not of this world, and we, as his subjects, we who bear witness to the *Truth*, are chosen and called out of this world into an eternal life of joy, peace, and love; a *Truth* beautifully expressed in these words from the Hymnal:

*Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature,
O thou of God and man the Son; Thee will I
cherish,
Thee will I honor, Thou, my soul's glory, joy,
and crown.*