

“A Different Kind of King”

John 18:33-37, Christ the King Sunday, November 22, 2015

Today is Christ the King Sunday and what many people may not know is that this day is relatively a new feast day as it appears on the liturgical calendar. It did not come about until 1925, when Pope Pius XI first declared it to be a feast day. Protestant Christians who were still worshipping in a liturgical fashion, soon thereafter, embraced “Christ the King” as a festival day too!

What was there that was going on in the world at that time that may have helped to create this day?

For one thing the world was still very much emerging from the dark days of World War I, that war that had often been referred to quite hopefully, but also very inaccurately, as “The War to End All Wars.”

Secondly, the whole world was standing very precariously now on the brink of an economic depression.

Thirdly there were some very charismatic leaders arising in various nations who all seemed to hold out hope for providing to their respective constituents necessary solutions to the great struggles people were facing. One was an Italian man by the name of Benito Mussolini and the other was a young German rabble-rouser named Adolf Hitler, whose Nazi Party was growing at a rapid pace in its popularity.

Fourthly, there was the threat also of the growing impact of “secularism” in the world, where more and more governmental structures and various segments of society like public schools and other agencies were doing their best to completely divest themselves and distance themselves from all religious teaching.

Therefore the Church sought to hold out a great message of hope to the world in the saving Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Yes, this is a day when we sing joyfully together some of those great hymn of our faith: “Crown Him with Many Crowns,” “Rejoice the Lord is King,” and “The King of Love My Shepherd Is,” but it is also a day when the Holy Spirit would prompt every one of us as individuals to make our profession of faith far more personal too! This is not simply a day when we as the Church say collectively to the world: “Christ is King,” but a day when each one of us may say to one another: “Christ Is My King!”

What do I mean when I say to you, “Christ Is My King?” I want you to know that I spend some considerable time this past week trying to answer this question.

- (1) For one thing it should mean that Christ’s Word is authoritative to me in my life. The Word of Christ should never be something I simply allow to go into one ear and out the other—it should become the number influence in my life.
- (2) Secondly, it should motivate me to say out loud that Christ is My King, even as he is the Lord of lords, and the King of kings. This day is a good reminder, however, of how easy it would be to allow Christ, either conscientiously or unconscientiously to become too

easily “trivialized” in my life whose influence over me is reduced to that of a “harmless hippie” who only wants to speak to me on occasion of flowers and peace, rather than to command me to repent of my sins and believe the Gospel.

In the Gospel lesson this morning, St. John is pulling back the curtain and allowing us to witness a conversation that took place between two rulers in that first century world; two “kings,” if you please, will allow me to use that title also to refer to Pontius Pilate for the sake of argument.

Here are the two kings facing one another and yet they certainly do seem initially to be miles apart from each other, don’t they? They are different in the way that they are dressed. They are different with respect to their surroundings. Here Pilate is living in the Governor’s Palace, which was no doubt decorated very ornately. But Jesus one day said, “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nest, but the Son of Man has nowhere to place his head!”

They were totally different that day in their demeanor. Pilate tells Jesus that he has the power to take a man’s life away from him by simply speaking forth that word. But Jesus tells Pilate that he would have no power over him unless it was granted to him by God.

Pilate has lots of soldiers ready to come to his defense, who would never have allowed himself to be treated in the shameless way that we see Jesus being treated here.

Friends what is there that makes Jesus a different kind of King?

Even though Jesus will die, Jesus will not be dying as the result of his own sins, as we all die as the result of our own sins, since St. Paul teaches us: “The wages of sin are death!” No for Jesus was without sin! But Pilate does eventually die because he was a sinner too!

Another great difference is that Pilate will lose forever his ability to reign over people on the day of his death, but Jesus, even following his death still rules and reigns over his people in the Church today.

But isn’t there, even thirdly, a gigantic difference between the way that Christ’s kingdom comes to us versus the way that all other earthly kingdoms are expanded in this world? So often earthly kingdoms are gained through all sorts of military movements. But Christ’s kingdom comes among us in a much more positive and quiet way.

Jesus taught us to pray: “Thy kingdom come!” “And how is this done?” Dr. Luther asks of us in his Small Catechism. “The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayers but we pray in this petition that it may also come among us! How is this done? When the Heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit so that we may believe his Word and live godly lives both here and in eternity!”

The hymn writer attests: **“Lead on, O King, eternal! Till sin’s fierce war shall cease, and holiness shall whisper the sweet Amen of peace. For not with swords loud clashing, or roll of stirring drums. With deeds of love and mercy the heavenly kingdom comes!”**

Seven different times, Pilate goes out of the praetorium to consult the angry mob whose only desire is to have Jesus crucified! “Why what evil has he done!” And they say: “He has

claimed to be 'King of the Jews!'" And according to their way of thinking, this was an offense so serious that the only proper punishment for Jesus would be his death!

Can't you just see Pilate vacillating back and forth in his own mind as he seeks to make a fair and proper estimation of Jesus? In the course of the questions that he is asking Jesus—three different times, he comes out and he says to the crowd. "I find not fault in this man," and "he is innocent of all wrongdoing!"

Earlier that morning—Procula, Pilate's wife told him at the breakfast table. I had a terrible dream about that man called Jesus last night! Have nothing to do with that innocent man!

Pilate wants to do the right thing. He certainly doesn't want to see Jesus be crucified. So Pilate then offers to honor for them his sacred annual tradition of setting a Jewish prisoner free. He finds the most dangerous felon he can possibly find a man named Barabbas. Shall I release to you Jesus or this fellow named Barabbas. And they call out "Barabbas!"

Then Pilate has Jesus scourged with a whip, crowned with thorns that the soldiers placated together for him! "Behold, the man!" hoping that this dreadful sight would satisfy their great desire to do Jesus harm. But they then even call out all the more so: "Crucify him, crucify him!"

And finally, in his desperation he calls for a basin of water and washes his hands of the whole affair. For as much as he wants to do the right thing, he wants to hold on to his own sense of security as well! He doesn't want to do anything to damage his own estimation in the eyes of the people of Judea. Especially when they cried out, "If you befriend this man you are no friend of Caesar's, for we have no king but Caesar!"

What Pilate did not realize, what the vast majority of people in the world at that time did not realize, and what the vast majority of people do not realize in the world today—is that the One standing before Pilate was "Immanuel," God-with-us. He came in fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and you shall call his name Immanuel, which means 'God with us!'" What Pilate didn't know is that standing right there before him was his very Creator, of whom St. John tells us way back in the first chapter: **"All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that has been made. In his was life and the life was the light of the world. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it!" (John 1:3-5)**

This was God-in-the-flesh that was standing before Pilate, even though his divine nature was completely hidden, in those awful moments behind his human nature, and even more so when he is nailed to a cross. But it was those moments when Jesus seemed to be his very weakest, that he was actually strongest to save!

There was a great Danish philosopher and theologian of the 19th Century named Soren Kierkegaard. He sought to help people understand the doctrine of the Incarnation much better in a sermon once preached on one Christmas Eve. In that story he tells the story of a wealthy prince, who strangely enough, fell in love with a human maiden who was living in the poorest village of his Father's entire kingdom. He so much wanted to go to her and profess his love for her. But what if she responded favorably to his advances, simply because he was the prince and simply

because of the wonderful life that he could offer her, even if she never really came to love him. He certainly didn't want that! So instead he decided to take off all of his royal garments, and to leave behind his royal guard. Putting on the humble clothes of a peasant himself, went to that village and lived alongside of that humble maiden, until she did fall in love with him, swept off her feet by his immense charm. It was only after they were married, that he revealed his truest identity to her and took her to the palace where they would live together happily ever after.

And Soren Kierkegaard makes a great analogy between this story and the pursuit of the Holy Son of God's love for us. Paul says, "Who even though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God as something to be grasped, but he emptied himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross, wherefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and earth and every tongue confess him to be Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:6-11)

PARABLE UNFORVING SERVANT – Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

**Crown him the Virgin's Son, behold his hands and side!
Rich wounds yet visible above in beauty glorified.
No angels in the sky, can fully bear that sight.
But downward bends their wondering eyes, at mysteries so bright!**

Today is Christ the King Sunday? Is Christ truly your king? Amen