

Homily Christ the King, Nov. 21, 2021

A few different thoughts from the many aspects of this great Solemnity. I begin with this article from a website called “Vatican News”:

“In the Year Three Twenty-Five [325], the First Ecumenical Council took place in the city of Nicea in Asia Minor. During that Council, the dogma regarding Christ’s divinity was defined [note – not created, but define] to counteract the Arian heresy: “Christ is God, light from light, true God from true God”. Sixteen hundred [1600] years later, in Nineteen Twenty-Five [1925], Pope Pius the Eleventh [XI] proclaimed that the best way to defeat injustice was by acknowledging the kingship of Christ. “For people are instructed in the truths of faith, and brought to appreciate the inner joys of religion far more effectually by the annual celebration of our sacred mysteries than by any official pronouncement of the teaching of the Church. Such pronouncements usually reach only a few and the more learned among the faithful; feasts reach them all; the former speak but once, the latter speak every year - in fact, forever. The church’s teaching affects the mind primarily; her feasts affect both mind and heart, and have a salutary [or “useful, helpful”] effect upon the whole of man’s nature” (Encyclical Quas primas, 11 December 1925).”

In other words, at Mass we reflect on the mysteries of our faith with our whole mind and heart and body at prayer. This sinks into our being more effectively than just memorizing a formula that Jesus is Ruler over all (which he is).

The Article also mentions that, *“The original date this feast was celebrated was the Sunday prior to All Saints Day...But with the liturgical reform of Nineteen Sixty-Nine [1969], it was moved to the last Sunday of the liturgical year, thus highlighting that Jesus Christ, the King, is the destination of our earthly pilgrimage...”*

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One scripture scholar who writes on the Sunday readings, John Bergsma, used a good illustration. He drew our attention to the Criadero War in Mexico, which took place from Nineteen twenty-six [1926] to Nineteen Twenty-nine [1929]. The war is described as, “...an uprising and counter-revolution against the Mexican government. It was set off by religious persecution of Catholics, specifically the strict enforcement of the anti-clerical provisions of the Mexican Constitution of Nineteen Seventeen [1917] and the expansion of further anti-clerical laws.” [Source, Wikipedia]. Many saints have come from those years; lay people, seminarians, and priests.

Mr. Bergsma wrote this about a dramatization of it that came out in Two-Thousand Twelve [2012], “*Some years ago a movie about the struggle for religious freedom for the Catholics of Mexico was released called For Greater Glory. The rallying cry of the persecuted Mexican believers was “Viva Cristo Rey!”, [or] “Long Live Christ the King!” For many of them, these were the last words out of their mouths before their violent deaths... “The example of these martyrs remind us that, finally, every human being will face Christ the King, the one who will pass final judgment on all that has been done in this life. Such is also the theme for this Sunday’s readings.”*”

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My brothers and sisters, today we hear Pilate ask, “Are you the King of the Jews?” For him this is a question of politics and power. Jesus turns it into a question of ultimate destiny and meaning.

For the Hebrew people, God was not one of many gods (little “g”). Their God was not a representation of some concept - like love or war. Their God was not a spirit that embodied and controlled a particular mountain or stream or forest. They understood that God had revealed Himself to them as the one God – the only God – the maker and sustainer of everyone and everything and everyplace. In God’s plan, broken humanity would someday come to recognize God and be united through and with the Israelites. And that promise was through a descendant of King David from a thousand years before Christ.

God is the God of everyone. Jesus, son of David and Son of God, is King of the Jews, and King of all. God is not just a concept. Jesus is the Incarnation, He is God in the Flesh.

Most of the time, the clockwork grandeur of the stars and the clouds and the environment - and the existence of chocolate – draw people’s attention to the awesome mystery of the One who made all of this. And more. And God has given us the authority – and the responsibility – to be good stewards of the rest of creation.

And that clockwork efficiency of the world has been sung throughout salvation history as the world obeying God’s commands. This view is then understood as an invitation to us, who have free will, to freely join the rest of creation in obeying God.

God is the source of life and health and happiness. God’s commands lead us to a fulfilling life. But more than that, His rule in our hearts leads us - over and over again

- to rediscover that He alone is worth our ultimate devotion. We are devoted to many people and causes, and even our nation. But the ultimate devotion only belongs to the One who is worthy of it. This devotion, this honor, alone belongs to God. And it is called adoration, and worship.

The King of the Jews is the Kings of all the universe. And, for those of us who might want to theorize about other universes in a sprawling multi-verse – just consider that here the word “Creation” is an adequate synonym for “Universe.” Jesus is King of All Creation.

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Finally, for today, I use some insights by Bishop Mueggenborg of the Diocese of Reno. He reminds of that everyone in the gospels who encounter Jesus is standing before ultimate reality, and must make a choice. This is how he writes it:

“One of the first things to notice about this passage is how quickly the trial of Jesus actually turns into the trial of Pilate! ...In this passage our Lord is asking Pilate to decide between a faith that is based on hearsay (what others have told him about Jesus) and a faith that is based on personal encounter and response (what he can say about Jesus on his own). Pilate has heard a lot about Jesus, but this is the moment when he meets Jesus for the first time and our Lord is offering him the relationship of faith. For this reason it is really the trial of Pilate rather than the trial of Jesus because the question to be resolved is how Pilate will respond to this opportunity: whether he will remain distant from Jesus and limit his knowledge to objective titles of faith or whether he will enter into a personal relationship with the Lord and make His own profession of faith.”

The Bishop goes on to ask a few questions, perhaps we can ruminate on at least one of them today and this week.

“What have other people told you about Jesus? What can you say about Jesus from your own life experience? When have you felt like you were on trial for your faith and how did you do? In what ways are we tempted to set the agenda for our prayer? How might you seek God’s agenda for your prayer?”