

Solemnity of Christ the King, November 24th 2024:

This feast originated in 1925. As the age of dictators was beginning, with Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany, Pope Pius XI, wanted to remind the faithful that, in spite of the political leaders who were demanding total allegiance at the time, our allegiance was to Jesus Christ. He alone is our Lord and King. Even though our times may be different to when this feast was first proclaimed, the message of the feast remains valid for all times. As Christians, our first allegiance is to Jesus, our Lord and King, whom today's second reading describes as 'the Ruler of the kings of the earth'.

In the course of his earthly life, Jesus was slow to accept the title 'King', even though He announced that the Kingdom of God was at hand in and through His person and ministry. That was because the kind of Kingdom He proclaimed was very different to the earthly kingdoms of the time and this is still valid at all times. On one occasion, when Jesus' disciples were arguing as to which of them was the greatest, Jesus said to them, 'The kings of the pagans lord it over them; and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you'. Jesus was warning His followers against taking their lead from kings and other authority figures of the time. It was as if Jesus was saying, 'don't turn the Kingdom of God into an earthly kingdom'.

In the Gospels, the first time the title 'King' is given to Jesus is during His Passion. It is as if the Gospel writers are saying to us, 'if you really want to understand how Jesus is a king, look at Jesus on the cross'. According to the Gospels, as Jesus hung on the Cross, there was a notice over his head which read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews'. It was meant in mockery, but it was true in ways that His enemies did not understand. As Jesus hung from the cross, He showed Himself to be a king of love.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is standing before the Pontius Pilate, who represented the King of Rome, Caesar. Pilate wants to know if Jesus is the kind of King who would be a threat to Rome's power. He asks Jesus, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus attempts to explain to Pilate what kind of a King He is. He is certainly not the kind of king Pilate is familiar with, as Jesus says, 'My Kingdom is not of this world'. He had earlier explained to his disciples that greatness in God's Kingdom means serving the least and most vulnerable, just as He came not to be served but to serve.

Jesus gives expression to God's Kingdom in the world by his loving service of all, even to the point of giving his life for all. Now He explains to Pilate that He gives expression to God's kingdom in the world by witnessing to the truth. He says, 'I am a king. I was born for this, I came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth'. In what sense does Jesus bear witness to the truth? He reveals the truth about God. He shows by all He says and does, and especially by His death, that the true God is a God of perfect love.

The truth that Jesus bears witness to is the truth of God's faithful love for the world. In the words of John's gospel, 'God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life'. The truth Jesus proclaims is 'God is Love'. This is how Jesus shows Himself to be a King.

Jesus' final words to Pilate in the Gospel readings call on Pilate to turn from his earthly king, Caesar in Rome, and to stand with Jesus, the King, 'All who are on the side of truth, listen to my voice'. If Pilate accepts this calling of Jesus to change, and if all the Pilates all over the World, then our World will have everlasting peace, because Jesus is the King of Peace, the King of love.

Jesus calls on all of us to show that we are on the side of truth by listening to His voice, especially when He speaks to us of God Who is love. We are to listen deeply to Jesus' Good News of God's love for the world, for each one of us, so that this Word of Jesus finds a home in our hearts and inspires us to love one another with the love of God. Jesus will be King of our lives when we love one another with the Lord's love. This is the call we receive at our Baptism, and that we hear afresh at every Eucharist. Whenever we bear witness to the Lord's love by the way we live, the Kingdom of God comes closer to earth through us.

Today, let us renew our commitment to Christ our King. Let us strive to follow Him more faithfully, allowing His reign to transform our hearts and guide our actions. In doing so, we become witnesses to His kingdom, proclaiming His love and mercy to all we encounter.

May Christ the King reign in our hearts and in our world, now and forever. Amen.