

In the name of the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Next week is the first Sunday of Advent. That means that today is the last Sunday of the long, green, growing season of Pentecost. On this day we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King. Now everyone in the nave of the Church today probably believes that the Church has *always* celebrated Christ the King Sunday. It is natural that you would feel that way because it is unlikely that there is anyone here today who was alive before the Church started its celebration of this feast. But it *is* a modern celebration.

Pope Pius XI first instituted the celebration of Christ as King in 1925. Now think about your world history for just a minute. Remember what was going on in the world at the end of 1925. World War I had been over for 7 years – but the scars were still very fresh from “The Great War,” or the “War of wars.” In this country the stock market was beginning its meteoric rise without support from the rest of the economy – a rise that inescapably would end with the 1929 crash and the Great Depression. The real income of many Americans had begun to fall while the wealth of a *few* continued rising dramatically. In Germany, Adolf Hitler, having gotten out of prison and published Mein Kampf, was beginning his entry into that country’s politics while Benito Mussolini had already dissolved parliament and declared himself dictator of Italy. The world was a mass of uncertainty. And Pius XI’s response was to proclaim Christ as King.

The decision to establish Christ the King Sunday was not a theological or a liturgical one, as much as it was a political one. You see, the Pope observed what was happening around the world – and particularly in Italy. He saw what appeared to be the entire world relying on corporations and/or governments to rule their lives. He saw that people’s lives hung in the balance as a result of corporate, social and governmental forces which had proven time and again not to care about average citizens. And Pius wanted everyone to know that what they read, heard and worried about was not the whole story.

Pope Pius observed throughout the world what he felt to be a lack of understanding of the Kingship of Christ. In other words, he wanted to fight back against what was termed an “atheism” that had grown out of the industrial revolution and the arrival of the “modern age.” He was concerned about society’s wrong understanding of what – or who – had dominion over the world; and the harmful political message that was sent by people who refused to recognize the King of kings and Lord of lords.

All of our readings for today relate to the idea that *Christ* is the sovereign – the King. Jeremiah tells about a time when God will send a wise and righteous king who will “execute justice and righteousness in the land.” In the letter to the Colossians, St. Paul talks about God sending the one through whom “all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers;” the One *for* whom all things were created. And in the Gospel, Luke tells the story of the

crucifixion – and speaks of the sign hanging above Jesus’ head that says, “This is the King of the Jews.”

It seems to me that today we are in the midst of an even deeper “atheism” than that observed by Pope Pius XI. Not only do we have all of the money and power worship and corporate control that existed in 1925; not only do we have the attitude of “self-reliance” that people trumpeted as “what makes America great,” that was present early in the twentieth century and which can easily become worship of self; but now we also have the worship of technology – which can fool people into feeling that the internet and faster gadgets are the answer to every issue facing us in life. I believe that the combination of the American belief in self-sufficiency and the power and allure of technology have drawn people relentlessly away from the Kingship of Christ.

But maybe Pius XI got it a little wrong, or at least overstated his position. Maybe it wasn’t *really* atheism. I recently read,

[It] is a matter, not of atheism, but of mere inattentiveness. Vagueness. When, back in the sixties, [Jesuit priest] John Courtney Murray was asked about atheism, he said that most people were ‘too damn busy’ to find time to worry about God. [Great Christian thinkers] had the notion that much of our disbelief in God was mere ‘divertissement’ ...¹.

That is to say, we are easily diverted from our pursuit of a relationship with Christ the King by the many things in our lives that occupy our minds and bodies and keep us from thinking deeply about our relationship with the one who is truly sovereign.

¹ The Rev. Dr. William Willimon, November 21, 2010, <http://www3.logosproductions.com>

There are not many people who regularly use the internet who have not had the experience of going on-line to browse a website for a particular reason and then looked at the clock and discovered that they had been “surfing” for several hours. That is a perfect example of *divertissement*. Rather than spending some portion of those hours in prayer, reading Scripture or in some way working for the Kingdom of God, the time is completely lost in pursuit of such “important” items as: the latest entertainment news, medical information, sports scores or political musings. But it’s not just the internet that can pull us away from a pursuit of the Kingdom. There are so many times when people have a choice between attending church or doing something “fun,” and choose the *divertissement*. Or folks choose to work extra time – or just get caught up at work – rather than coming and acknowledging who the real King of their lives is.

On this day – and later this week when we celebrate Thanksgiving Day – we should give thanks – not just for the blessings we’ve been given by God, but also for the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ. But remember that I said the determination to begin celebrating Christ the King Sunday was a political one. That is because recognizing Jesus as King of kings is a political decision as well as a faith decision. Jesus’ message was a counter-cultural message. And that makes it political. Bishop Willimon puts it this way:

Luke says that when Jesus was born the first to get the news were poor shepherds working the night shift. Matthew remembers strange gentile Magi from the East offering rich treasures to the new ‘king.’ Their accounts taken together are a politically charged announcement of an all-embracing

kingdom that breaks down the power structures upon which all worldly kingdoms are built: the rich over the poor, the homefolk protected from foreigners, Caesar like a god, and the military (as) the sole means of national security².

Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."³ This King of kings, this Lord of lords does not want us to pay tribute to Him as other kings throughout history have wanted and demanded. This King of kings never lived as other kings live, so what this King wants is not what other kings have wanted. Instead, Jesus wants for us to believe that He is who He is and to act accordingly.

This King's main aim is to care for those who cannot care for themselves. Corporations do not care for the needy. And frankly, governments haven't been doing such a great job either. But Jesus *always* cares for those no one else recognizes. He ate with sinners and consorted with outcasts. He touched the untouchable and gave hope to the hopeless. He asks the same from us. Feed the hungry. Give drink to those who thirst. Give clothing to those who need it. Visit those who are not visited by anyone else. Or as our own baptismal covenant puts it so eloquently, "strive for justice and peace

² Id.

³ Matthew 25:34-36

among all people, and respect the dignity of *every* human being.” The King of kings would have it no other way.

In conclusion, let us pray:

Almighty and everliving God, sovereign ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for all of your people. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ. Amen.