

Solemnity of Christ the King, B – November 25, 2018 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 750 words

Each of our readings this Sunday speaks of the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ. The first reading tells of “one like a son of man”, who “received dominion, glory, and kingship”. Our psalm response was, “The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty”. The second reading presented Christ to us as “the faithful witness...ruler of the kings of the earth.... the Alpha and the Omega...the almighty”. And in the gospel, Christ himself tells us, “My kingdom does not belong to this world”. God has revealed himself in Christ as a king; monarchy is the form of government that he has chosen for his creation.

This Sunday, then, we are invited to consider our place in Christ’s kingdom. And this may be a bit of a challenge for us. For our model of “kingship” in the Western world has largely changed. Most places where there is still a king or a queen, the government has become a constitutional monarchy. The king or queen is nothing more than a figurehead, not directly involved in the day-to-day running of the realm. Their rule has been superseded by a more democratic, parliamentary process. The will of the people – or more often, the will of this or that majority – tends to be what guides the fate of the country.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, however, is not a mere figurehead who only shows himself on special occasions in beautiful ceremonies full of pomp and splendor. His kingship is actual; it is real. He is involved in the day-to-day, down to the finest details. He has given a law for his kingdom and he has also told us that we will render an account for our observance of it. Indeed, his law is identical with the truth, and he tells us in the gospel, “everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice”. Those who belong to Christ obey him. Those who obey him are subjects – citizens in the fullest sense – of his kingdom.

But could it be, sometimes, that we are rather something more like resident aliens in the kingdom of Christ? Have we ever fallen prey to seeing Jesus more as a figurehead, busying ourselves with being “democratic” about what he has revealed? I am afraid that this may be the case for many today. How often do I hear people suggesting that this or that Church teaching should change – or that what Christ’s Church has always taught about some matter or another perhaps no longer should be the case! Such individuals may not, in fact, be living as subjects in Christ’s kingdom. He may be more of a useful distraction: someone who makes no real claim on them, who can be called upon at will – but then, so often, set aside.

But maybe the idea of being a “subject” frightens us a little. We could understand it as an imposition or a loss of freedom. Against such temptations, we should consider what our Lord said and did in the gospels. He never imposed himself on anyone. He always proposes and invites. He is truth, and truth makes a claim on us – but not by force. He is also love. “Neither love nor truth are ever imposed: they come knocking at the doors of the heart and the mind and where they can enter, they bring peace and joy. This is how God reigns; this is his project of salvation...”¹ We need think only of Jesus’ loving words: “Come to me, all you who labor...and I will give you rest.... My yoke is easy, and my burden, light”.²

Christ our King stands at the door of our hearts and lovingly knocks. His teachings – his truth – very often do challenge us: he proposes the very high standard of sanctity. As he says elsewhere in the gospel, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”.³ We often fall far short of this perfection, but he is a benevolent King who is always ready to forgive and let

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus Address, 26 November 2006.

² Matthew 11:28-30.

³ Matthew 5:48.

us try again. If we live and die as subjects of his kingdom on earth, he will grant us to reign with him forever in the glory of his heavenly kingdom. This must be the goal that we seek in every aspect of how we live. Let us invite the Lord Jesus anew this day to reign in our hearts and in our lives. May he take away whatever is alien to his love and his truth. May we receive him with peace and with joy.