

November 24, 2013

Homily of Deacon David Close

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ King of the  
Universe

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today is a special day on the Catholic calendar. Today is the last Sunday of the liturgical year. Next Sunday is the First Sunday of Advent, marking the beginning of a new year, and a new three-year liturgical cycle. Today also marks the closing of the Year of Faith, a year begun with Pope Benedict XVI, and finished with Pope Francis. The year has been one of enthusiasm, reaffirmation, and faith in action in the Church as a whole, in this diocese, and in this parish. Today is also the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King of the Universe. We celebrate Christ the King.

This beautiful feast emerged from a period of great difficulty. It is not an ancient feast, only

created in 1925 by Pope Pius XI. At that time, it was with a strong sense of symbolic power that the choice of last Sunday in October was chosen for the feast, and of great importance in terms of the prevailing political situation: the Russian communists came to power with their revolution of October 1917 and the Italian Fascists in October 1922 with their March on Rome. The specific instance for the Pope to make it a solemn feast was the martyrdom of a Catholic priest, Father Miguel Pro, during the revolution in Mexico whose shout and gesture just before his execution, “Viva Cristo Rey!” rang throughout the entire Church. The institution of the feast was almost an act of defiance by the Church against dictators who at the time were seeking to make absolute their own political ideologies, insisting boldly that no earthly power, no particular political system or military dictatorship is ever absolute. The feast was to restate that only the Kingdom of God is absolute, and that this Kingdom is everyone’s source of power. The year 1925 was also the sixteenth

centenary of the Council of Nicaea which in the Year 325 defined, proposed, and added to the Creed the words “of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Since the church calendar reform of Vatican II in 1969, the feast celebrating Christ’s kingship is observed on the Sunday just before Advent, when we begin a new Church year and liturgically wait for the promised Messiah. At the end of the liturgical year the feast of the Kingship of Christ sets the crowning glory upon the mysteries of the life of Christ already commemorated during the year.

We read throughout Scripture that Christ is King. The title “King”, designating Jesus, is very important in the Gospels and makes possible a complete interpretation of Jesus and of his mission of salvation. A progression in Scripture can be noted: it starts with the expression “King of Israel” and extends to that of universal King, Lord of the cosmos and of history. The testimony of the Prophets is abundant. In Samuel, we learn parts of the Old Testament definition, as Jewish kings were

expected to be different from their gentile counterparts. Initially led by judges, the Israelites prayed to God to appoint a Jewish King. Saul was the first, but David demonstrated better than any other monarch Yahweh's care and concern for his chosen people. David was expected to "shepherd" his people, not lord it over them. He was expected to make the people, not himself, the focus of his reign. He was expected to be an outward sign of Yahweh's care and concern. Though he was king, he was expected to obey the same rules and regulations as everyone else in the kingdom. And more than anything else he was expected to be the champion of the helpless. Widows, orphans, resident aliens could depend on him 24/7 for his help.

The same doctrine of the Kingship of Christ which we find in the Old Testament is more clearly taught and confirmed in the New Testament. The early followers of Jesus were just as convinced that God's care and concern for them was demonstrated through Jesus of Nazareth's death and resurrection.

The historical Jesus was the outward sign of God's care and concern.

It is the mystery of Jesus Christ death and Resurrection that lies at the heart of the process of the revelation of his kingship. Throughout his life Jesus refused to be made into a king or political leader. He did not want a political kingdom by force. Rather, only at the end of his earthly life, stripped of all earthly influence and authority, in poverty and humility, standing bound before a corrupt earthly judge, does Jesus declare his kingship. Standing before Pilate in the Pretorium, the very heart of political power, Jesus bears witness to the truth that real power is not the ability to coerce others, but the strength to love; that true control is about self-sacrifice; that real life is found only through death itself. In doing so Jesus turns our human values upside down and proclaims a new and radical form of kingship. He does not coerce, but rather invites a response. In this encounter with Pilate, Christ offers an example for all Christians, who like Christ are called to bear witness to the

truth through their lives. Prompted by the Roman inscription placed above the crucified Jesus' head, his enemies taunted him "if you are the King of the Jews save yourself!" In other words, real kings save themselves first. Luke's Jesus responds to their taunt by instinctively taking care of someone else first, the criminal crucified next to him. Throughout Luke's passion narrative, no matter how much pain Jesus is suffering, he's always concerned for others.

The Cross is the paradoxical sign of his kingship, which consists in following the loving will of God the Father in response to the disobedience of sin. It is in the very offering of himself in the sacrifice of his life that Jesus becomes King of the universe. After the Resurrection he declares to his apostles: "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

In what does the "power" of Jesus Christ the King consist? It is not the power of the great people of the world. It is the power of love that can draw good from evil, to defeat the dominion of death.

The Grace of God is never imposed; it always respects our freedom. Every conscience must make a choice. The kingdom of God requires a new justice; it requires commitment in doing God's will; it calls for expressing the inner simplicity of children, a spirit of gentleness, and a spirit of detachment from earthly materials. The Beatitudes might be called the Magna Carta of the Kingdom. The beatitudes do not only indicate the requirement of the Kingdom. They also manifest the work that God accomplishes in us by making us similar to his Son.

Who do I want to follow? Choosing Christ does not guarantee success according to the world's criteria, but assures the peace and joy that he alone can give us. Choosing Christ is choosing to make one's life into a sign of the cross and preach Christ by daily living in his truth: in mind, heart and will.

The Gospels consistently emphasize that as followers of Jesus, we are to relate to one another by service, not domination. We are to be servants

of those whom most other people ignore. The Gospels present His Kingdom as one which men prepare to enter by penance, and cannot actually enter except by faith and by baptism, which through an external sacramental rite signifies and produces an interior transformation of spiritual identity.

The Church prays to the Father in every Eucharistic celebration that his kingdom may come. She lives in fervent expectation of “an eternal and universal kingdom, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.” This expectation of the Lord is our constant source of confidence and strength.

[www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) “Quas Primas.” Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on the Feast of Christ the King.