

Sermon for Christ the King A
Sunday, November 26, 2023
“The King of All Earthly Rulers”

Text: Matthew 25:31-46

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Many years ago when I was a youngster, I was sitting in my father’s boat in the middle of Lake Mead, Nevada where we were fishing in the middle of the night. I looked at the sky and was filled with awe by the thousands upon thousands of stars that I could see, more than I had ever seen before. Some years later, I had the same experience one night on a beach in Jamaica. I was left completely speechless, utterly gobsmacked as I beheld the vast expanse of space and the work of the hand of the Creator that was far beyond my feeble understanding. I knew that God is real. I knew that God was far bigger and and far greater than I. In the mid-17th Century, the English priest John Mason inspired by God’s incomprehensible majesty wrote:

How shall I sing that majesty
which angels do admire?
Let dust in dust and silence lie;
sing, sing, ye heavenly choir.
Thousands of thousands stand around
thy throne, O God most high;
ten thousand times ten thousand sound
thy praise; but who am I?

We’re going to sing those soul-stirring words as the hymn after the communion today. Has anything ever filled you with such awe that you knew that God is real? Have you ever found yourself feeling trapped or struggling, or so pressed with the weight of the world that only the majesty of God gave you hope? The Solemnity of Christ the King is a festival of the Church given to us to inspire hope when the weight of the world seems hopeless.

The Feast or Solemnity of the Reign of Christ the King was declared by Pope Pius XI in 1925 at a time when the world, particularly in Europe, lived under the threat of several adversarial powers that claimed the rights to rule over the people of the world and of secularism that threatened the church itself. Instability and uncertainty were strong and rampant when there came a beacon of hope, a reminder that there was a solid foundation onto which the world could hold, that Christ is the ruler of this world.

Nearly one hundred years later, we still live in a world where rulers and powers threaten the sovereignty of nations, where people in power threaten, abuse, and violate the rights of other people whom they think are insignificant or don’t matter. We experience leaders who act as though they are bigger, better, richer, or wiser. But the

Solemnity of Christ the King is a declaration that none of us—high or low, rich or poor—can come close to the majesty of God. Christ is the true king, and it is through him that all other power derives.

This past May, if you witnessed the coronation of King Charles, you know that it was a grand, over-the-top, glorious event full of pageantry and pomp. But before he was crowned, there was a point in the ceremony where the king was hidden behind a screen. He was stripped of his regal attire down to the undergarments, and in front of the altar, Charles Philip Arthur George knelt in humility as a servant of the true King, while he was anointed with the oil of chrism. Even he had to acknowledge Christ as the true King who governs over his authority.

Our earthly rulers—those who govern us, be they presidents, congresspeople, kings, dictators, whatever they call themselves—are not hesitant to issue rules, laws, edicts, and make other legal declarations that affect how we live, but today’s gospel gives us a clear understanding of how the world’s true king expects us to live. His edict isn’t about self-preservation, self-interest, or self-motivation; his decree isn’t about winners or losers. His strength isn’t about who has authority or sovereignty over whom. His edict tells us how to live in harmony with each other. Jesus said, “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.” God’s law, declared by those words of Christ the King, are about caring for each other, loving one another, and empowering one another. To use whatever power, privilege, money, talent, or wisdom that any of us feeble humans might have for the benefit of each other. That is God’s command to us. When we do that, then we see a glimpse of the kingdom of God. That’s so different from the rulers and sovereignties of the world, in which they seek self-preservation, self-determination, and self-interest. Those things aren’t inherently bad, but if we do as our true ruler commands us to do, the preservation, determination, and interest of all of God’s people will be possible and can be realized. That’s what God’s kingdom looks like. That’s the kind of world I want to live in. Just imagine if all the world submitted to the reign of Christ and did as he instructed!

Even you and I can be a part of this; we don’t have to have a title or a crown to do it. We need to spend more time caring. We need to spend more time attending to the needs of God’s people: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting and calling each other, advocating for justice, praying for those who have lost hope, praying for those who are trying to find their way.

This world is a place of instability and uncertainty, of injustice and selfishness, of women and men who try to assert their earthly authority. But humankind has a fair, just, unchanging, and unfailing ruler. Christ’s kingship brings stability, certainty, justice,

and empowerment to all. Even if you find yourself in a bleak situation, submitting to the King of kings and Lord of lords brings liberation, freedom, and peace. God's kingdom is not an idyllic place that once was, nor does it have to be a utopian pipe dream for an unknown future time. The God's kingdom must manifest in our own time and we have to be the proclaimers of Christ's reign. We have to be the King's ambassadors, telling and showing the world that there is hope, because we are full of hope and that love wins, because we show love and charity.

John Mason's hymn ends with hope, because it reminds us that no matter what is happening to us or in the world around us, God knows all, sees all, rules over all, and is greater than any of us:

How great a being, Lord, is thine,
which doth all beings keep!
Thy knowledge is the only line
to sound so vast a deep.
Thou art a sea without a shore,
a sun without a sphere;
thy time is now and evermore,
thy place is everywhere. Amen.