

## CHRIST THE KING, 2025

Kingship in the Bible is an odd thing, really. King David was admired, but clearly fallible. King David founded a line of Kings that the Bible proclaims will last forever, but the Bible also describes most of the kings of his line as being rather poor quality. Indeed, with the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians late in the 6th century B.C., the kingship itself was extinguished. Several centuries later, a descendent of David's line, once royal but now impoverished and obscure, Jesus of Nazareth, was acclaimed as king, but in ambiguous and ironic ways. Ambiguously, a crowd in Jerusalem hailed Him as king on Palm Sunday - Hosanna to the Son of David! - and then abandoned Him on Good Friday. Ironically, He was labelled a king on Good Friday - Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews - but so labelled in mockery.

What are we to make of kingship in the Bible?

Until we come to Jesus, we are dealing with kingship OF this world. When we come to Jesus, we come to an entirely different kind of Kingship, one that is IN this world, but is not OF this world. Regarding kingship OF this world, we find two kinds in the Bible, legitimate and illegitimate. The kingship of Saul at the start of his reign, and the Kingship of David and his line, are legitimate. The kingship of Saul at the end of his reign, the kingship of the Old Testament's Samarian kings, and the kingship of the New Testament's Herodian kings, is illegitimate.

There isn't time to say much in this homily about kingship OF this world. One paragraph will have to suffice.

Kingship OF this world is either legitimate or illegitimate. It is legitimate if its power comes from God, and is used, despite human frailties and lapses, to uphold public justice and the common good. Given human frailties, kingship OF this world is necessary. Like the People of Israel who asked Samuel to give them a king, every nation needs some kind of commander in chief, first citizen, or prince. Certainly, the founders of the American Republic came to that conclusion. The "king" might be elective or hereditary, serving for life or for a limited term only, but, in any case, there must be a commander in chief, first citizen, or prince. The "king," by whatever name, is legitimate if he admits that his power comes ultimately from God through a lawful public process that involves the People. As St. Thomas Aquinas observed, the "king" acts in the person ("personam gerit") of the People, and therefore exercises his power by popular consent. If a "king" rules without some kind of popular consent, the kingship is illegitimate, a mere tyranny. If a "king" dares to suppose that his power doesn't come ultimately from God, the kingship is also illegitimate, a mere tyranny. Since the "king's" power comes from God through the People for the sake of preserving and defending public justice, a kingship that is merely selfish is illegitimate as well, also a mere tyranny. Given human weakness, every "king" will be tempted towards selfishness, and therefore needs to have his power balanced by some sort of supervisory "senate", "assembly", or "court."

Thus, legitimate kingship OF this world comes from God through the People, is exercised, under God, for the sake of the common good and public justice, and is subject to some kind of supervision by a lawful and competent "senate" of some sort.

Kingship not OF this world, the Kingship of Jesus Christ, the Conqueror of Sin and Death, is entirely different.

The Kingship of Jesus Christ begins with the Cross.

The Kingship of Jesus Christ begins not with glory but with humiliation. He is now Risen and glorified, but even now the Kingship of Jesus Christ is only recognized through Faith. Faith, the Faith of Blessed Mary, the Mother of Sorrows standing at the foot of the Cross, recognized Him as King even on the Cross. The Faith of the Good Thief also recognized Jesus as King on the Cross. "Remember me, when You come into your Kingdom!" Jesus responded, "Today, you will be with Me in Paradise."

Since the Kingship of Jesus Christ is not OF this world, citizenship in His Kingdom is citizenship in Heaven. To acknowledge Jesus as King by Faith, and to live in obedience to Him, is the way to Eternal Life. This is the Faith that, by God's gift, saves us. We Catholics are very reluctant to say that we are saved by Faith alone, lest we forget that to acknowledge Jesus Christ as King but then fail to obey Him in practice is the worst kind of treason. To have Faith in Jesus Christ, and to obey Him as King, is the way to live with Him. Since Jesus Christ is True Man, we can live with Him. Since Jesus Christ is True God, to live with Him is to live with God. Starting in this life, we can, by Faith and obedience, live with God. In the Life to Come, we will live perfectly united to God, sharing in Divine Life eternally.

Today's Feast of Christ the King calls us to have Faith in Him as King, even though His kingship is not OF this world. Not being OF this world, His kingship cannot be recognized and obeyed without Faith. By Faith, however, we can both recognize and obey the Kingship of Jesus Christ.. By that recognition and obedience, we will enter into Eternal Life.

The mission of the Church IN this world is to call all human beings to Faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ. Every once in a while, someone will post or brag about all the medical, educational, and social work done by the Catholic Church. Such work is good, and yet, "God forbid that I should boast, save in the Cross of Christ." While done IN the world, such work is done for the sake of something, and someone, not OF this world. All of the Church's work must be done for the sake of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. Ultimately, the Church exists for one purpose and one purpose only, to "transfer" souls (Colossians 1:12-13) from this world into the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Eternal Life.

Once, by God's Grace, we have been "transferred" into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, we, even living IN this world are no longer OF this world. We belong to Jesus Christ, and receive from Him, even in this world, a peace and joy from beyond this world. Already, by Faith, the Kingdom of God is within us. Already, by the gift of Divine Love, we have begun to live a heavenly life.