

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

November 25, 2018

Lectionary Notes and Prayers of the Faithful

Background

On the last Sunday of each liturgical year, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, or Christ the King.

Pope Pius XI instituted this feast in 1925 with his encyclical *Quas primas* (“In the first”) to respond to growing secularism. He recognized that attempting to “thrust Jesus Christ and his holy law” out of public life would result in continuing discord among people and nations. Today reminds us that while governments come and go, Christ reigns as King forever.

During the early twentieth century, in Mexico, Russia, and in many parts of Europe, atheistic regimes threatened not just the Catholic Church and its faithful but civilization itself. Pope Pius XI’s encyclical gave Catholics hope and—while governments around them crumbled—the assurance that Christ the King shall reign forever. Pope Pius XI says that Christ “reign[s] ‘in the hearts of men,’ both by reason of the keenness of his intellect and the extent of his knowledge, and also because he is very truth, and it is from him that truth must be obediently received by all mankind.”

In 2018, the Church faces pressures from without and crisis from within. In addition to the challenges that Christians in a secular society must confront, the body of Christ must also tend to the wounds inflicted on the Church by priests and bishops who either committed acts of sexual abuse themselves or failed to respond to abuse with justice when they had the opportunity. Pope Pius XI reminds the faithful that Christ reigns as king of the entire world forever. Let us rededicate ourselves this year to acknowledging the reign of Jesus Christ and his Sacred Heart in every aspect of our lives.

First Reading – Daniel 7:13-14

As the visions during the night continued, I saw
one like a Son of man coming,
on the clouds of heaven;
when he reached the Ancient One
and was presented before him,
the one like a Son of man received dominion, glory, and kingship;
all peoples, nations, and languages serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that shall not be taken away,
his kingship shall not be destroyed.

Notes

- The prophet Daniel sees a vision of one like a Son of Man receiving dominion all peoples, nations and kingdoms. When Jesus stood before Caiaphas, He spoke of the fulfillment of that vision in Himself (see Matt 26:64). Jesus Himself will judge all nations, and He works through His Church in the world.
- This vision may seem like it is not being fulfilled. Many countries in the West are turning from the faith. Christians in the Middle East, Nigeria, China, and other places face intense, violent persecution. Christians are not the only ones who suffer. Muslims in places like Burma and China are also being severely persecuted. On top of all these struggles, the Church in many places has squandered her credibility to deal with these issues by failing to root out corruption and immorality within her own ranks. We should not be surprised at this, for it has ever been a struggle for the faithful. Daniel saw this vision when his people were in exile in Babylon. And the vision recounted in this reading begins with a prophecy of four terrible powers on earth imposing war and oppression.
- Over the course of time, all the powers of this earth fade away, while the accomplishments dedicated to the kingdom of God remain. After all, the Roman Empire and the kingdoms of the Middle Ages have long since vanished, but the Church has preserved what was best in it. The Church remains, often preserving the best of the cultures in which she found herself. Time brings an end to all nations on earth, but the best of every land is redeemed by Christ.

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 93:1, 1-2, 5

R. (1a) The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.
The LORD is king, in splendor robed;
robed is the LORD and girt about with strength.
R. The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.
And he has made the world firm,
not to be moved.
Your throne stands firm from of old;
from everlasting you are, O LORD.
R. The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.
Your decrees are worthy of trust indeed;
holiness befits your house,
O LORD, for length of days.
R. The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.

Notes

- The Psalmist celebrates the glory and the permanence of the reign of God and of His precepts. Once again, this vision is difficult to see when we are immersed in a world of war, chaos, scandal, and division.

- In the midst of all of this chaos and strife, the truth of God shines through and in fact increases throughout this time. The Church teaches the same faith she has ever taught. And, despite our different backgrounds, the Church does unite peoples in Christ. We are made one body by partaking of the body of Christ.

Second Reading – Revelation 1:5-8

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness,
 the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth.
 To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,
 who has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father,
 to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.
 Behold, he is coming amid the clouds,
 and every eye will see him,
 even those who pierced him.
 All the peoples of the earth will lament him.
 Yes. Amen.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God,
 “the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty.”

Notes

- John sees Jesus as the great ruler of the kings of the earth, who makes His people a free kingdom, freed from sin and able to be “priests for his God and Father”. This vision describes what true freedom is, namely freedom from sin and freedom to participate in the love of God. Americans often misunderstand what freedom is. If one asks what freedom is, the most common response would probably be the ability to do whatever one likes. However, that is the freedom of a wild animal, which is really the dominance of one’s desires over one’s calling to holiness and true love. As Jesus says, “He who commits sin is a slave of sin” (Jn 8:34; see also Rom 6:5-14).
- However, as Pope St. John Paul II says in Chapter 8 of his last book, *Memory and Identity*, “Freedom is for love.” For love is the one thing that cannot be compelled. It must be freely given and freely received; otherwise, it is not love. And love, so freely given and received makes us, as St. John says, born of God and able to know Him (see 1 Jn 4:7).
- In this context, we see the rightful basis for freedom and human rights. We are entitled to certain rights because we have the calling to live out the love of God in many ways. Pope Benedict writes: “it is important to call for a renewed reflection on how rights presuppose duties, if they are not to become mere license” (*Caritas in veritate*, 42). This connection between rights and duties may seem like a limitation, but it is in fact the only sure foundation for human dignity and liberty.

Gospel: John 18:33b-37

Pilate said to Jesus,
“Are you the King of the Jews?”
Jesus answered, “Do you say this on your own
or have others told you about me?”
Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I?
Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me.
What have you done?”
Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world.
If my kingdom did belong to this world,
my attendants would be fighting
to keep me from being handed over to the Jews.
But as it is, my kingdom is not here.”
So Pilate said to him, “Then you are a king?”
Jesus answered, “You say I am a king.
For this I was born and for this I came into the world,
to testify to the truth.
Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

Notes

- Here we see the great paradox of Jesus showing His power by suffering. At a superficial level, it seems that Pilate is the one in power. And Jesus seems like the failed leader, whose supporters were not with Him. But, with sacred wisdom, we see the reverse. The seemingly powerful Roman governor is in fact cowering before the mobs, allowing a death he knows is unjustified, and in general only keeping the pretense of order. By contrast, Jesus, fulfilling the ideal of kings leading their armies into battle, heads triumphantly to confront sin and death, preparing to defeat them.
- The West is cutting itself off from its roots. As Pope Benedict XVI has said: “Today, that consensus has eroded significantly in the face of powerful new cultural currents, which are not only directly opposed to core moral teachings of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but are also increasingly hostile to Christianity as such. It is imperative that the entire Catholic Church in the United States comes to realize the grave threats to the Church’s public moral witness in the cultural and political spheres.”
- As Catholics, contribute to the building of the common good in our society by bearing witness to the reign of Christ in public life. Pope Francis encouraged American Catholics in this regard during his speech at the White House: “American Catholics are committed to building a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive, to safeguarding the rights of individuals and communities, and to rejecting every form of unjust discrimination. With countless other people of good will, they are likewise concerned that efforts to build a just and wisely ordered society respect their deepest concerns and their right to religious liberty. That freedom remains one of America’s

most precious possessions. And, as my brothers, the United States Bishops, have reminded us, all are called to be vigilant, precisely as good citizens, to preserve and defend that freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it.”

- By failing in so many instances to adequately address the sexual abuse that proliferated in the Church, and to face the sinfulness within the Church squarely and honestly, the Church has greatly weakened her moral witness, her voice that needs to be heard. Jesus tells Pilate that everyone who belongs to the truth listens to the voice of Jesus, the king. The Solemnity of Christ the King is a day for Catholics to rededicate themselves to the truth by listening to the voice of Christ and to recognizing the reign of Christ by obeying his word. It is only under the reign of Christ our sovereign king that we will see renewal in our Church and in our country.

Prayer of the Faithful

Deacon/Reader:

1. For Pope Francis, our Bishop N., and all the ministers of the Church, that their preaching and example may encourage the faithful to stand firm in their beliefs as witnesses of the Gospel, *we pray to the Lord...*
2. For our President, Governor, legislators, judges, and all in service to the common good, that through the gift of heavenly wisdom, they may never tire in their work to uphold religious freedom and conscience protection for all, *we pray to the Lord...*
3. For those discerning God’s call in their lives: may they be open to listen to the Lord’s voice and find support to say ‘yes’ to his invitation to serve freely in love, *we pray to the Lord...*
4. For the many ministries of the Church , especially our educational institutions, health care facilities, community centers, and charitable services, especially the Catholic Campaign for Human Development: may they enjoy full protection to fulfill their mission, *we pray to the Lord...*
5. For the sick who long for healing, for the dying, and for those called to heal and comfort the sick and suffering: may they be free to follow their faith, while fulfilling their professional duties, *we pray to the Lord...*
6. For all of us who gather in prayer, trusting in God’s grace to save: may we, through the gifts of the Spirit, have the wisdom to know God’s will and find courage to stand up in witness to his love, *we pray to the Lord...*
7. For those who have died and for all who grieve and mourn their passing from this life: may the promise of resurrection for the just give hope to all, *we pray to the Lord...*

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