

November 21, 2021

11:30 a.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

34th/Last Sunday in Ordinary Time/Solemnity of Christ the King

Today we join with the Church throughout the world in celebrating one of our most beautiful Feasts----the Solemnity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe! On this Sunday, the Church Year is completed---everything that we have celebrated for these last 51 weeks, from our Lord's first coming and His Birth in Bethlehem last Advent/Christmas; thru following Jesus in His ministry of publicly proclaiming that He had come to launch the Kingdom of God that would be IN this world but not OF this world; listening to Jesus' teaching of the Gospel values in the Sermon on the Mount, and as He gave personal witness to those Values in His own Life as He called all people to follow Him, as He worked miracles, as He extended God's Mercy and Forgiveness to saints and sinners alike; and most especially by following Jesus through the Last Supper, and through the Paschal Mystery of His suffering, Death, Resurrection and Ascension, and of course the powerful Feast of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit in-spired and encouraged the Apostles to finally begin the mission Jesus had entrusted to them which resulted in the Birth of the Church---all of that has led up to this ultimate Sunday when we, and all the world, hail Jesus as our Lord, our Savior, and Christ our King!

This is also the Sunday right before one of our most treasured national holidays----Thanksgiving---which we will all be celebrating on Thursday of this week. Even though we all realize that we are far from being out from under the effects of COVID-19, we are in a far better place for this year's celebration of Thanksgiving than we were last year----so, I'm sure many of us will be traveling to other places, or hosting others who may be traveling here. Whatever we do, I pray that all of us may have a wonderful, safe and healthy celebration, and that we can be truly thankful for ALL the many blessings that we've been given.

But today, what is uppermost in our minds is this beautiful Feast of Christ the King, which marks the last Sunday of the Liturgical Year, and can be summarized by the beautiful words of our 2nd Reading this morning from the Book of Revelation: ***“Jesus Christ is the Faithful Witness...He has freed us from our sins by His blood (and) has made us into a kingdom, priests for His God and Father:....to Him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.”***

So, just like every other aspect of our lives, which are filled with many different “endings and new beginnings”, so it is with our Liturgical Year. When we come back to Mass next Sunday, we will begin a new Church Year with the brief Season of Advent, preparing us for the celebration of Christ’s Birth on Christmas; and from there, the Liturgical Cycle will proceed for another year.

But I think we need to stop and realize how ***vital***ly important it is for each of us to see ourselves as **active participants** in the annual observance of all these special Feasts, and not just as **passive observers**, because what we celebrate here has, or should be having, profound effects on our spiritual lives.

Even though the Liturgical Year remains the same each year, we do not. We are constantly growing, changing, hopefully maturing in every aspect of our lives. So while the Liturgical Seasons remain the same each year---Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ordinary Time---we who celebrate those Seasons and Feasts, are always doing so from a different point along our own life journey.

Think back for a moment to the Feast of Christ the King last year. At the very least, we were all a year younger! And no matter if you were in school, employed, raising a family, or in your retirement years, our lives today are different in many ways than they were a year ago. Perhaps our life circumstances have been altered or changed in this year, either through employment status, illness, separation from those we love, or possibly even the death of someone dear to us. The point is that all of us are constantly changing and growing in our lives. And I hope that is also true in terms of our own *faith lives*.

So, today’s Feast of Christ the King is a perfect time to ask ourselves: where am I in relation to my Faith? Am I stronger in my faith, more committed to following Christ, the King; or perhaps do I find that I have wavered a bit----maybe even a lot? Today’s 2nd Reading proclaimed that “Jesus Christ is the Faithful Witness”. Can we say that same thing about ourselves?

As we celebrate Christ the King today, we also celebrate His Kingdom. We need to realize that Jesus came into our world to establish God’s Kingdom here among us. By being born, by living, dying and rising again---that’s how Jesus accomplished His Mission; but the Mission has not been finished. Jesus’ Mission now continues on through the Church; and, as those who are baptized into Christ--we who are Jesus’ followers---His Mission is now OUR mission. We need to figure out how each of us can help to advance God’s Kingdom IN our world, but

not to be a part of, or the same as, the “kingdoms” OF this world. God’s Kingdom has begun, but it is still becoming what God wants it to be: a world in which all people will live in harmony, and where we can treat one another with the divine attributes of justice, love and peace, which is what God has intended from the beginning of the world. When we pray the Our Father, we say: “Thy Kingdom come”. God’s Kingdom is still unfolding, and we, the Church----we who are the followers of Christ----are the ones who now share in the responsibility for building God’s Kingdom through the ways that we live our lives---by the ways that we fulfill our job responsibilities or the ways we apply ourselves as students---by the ways that we are faithful to our vocations as married people, single people, religious, or those ordained to serve God’s holy people---by the ways that we put our Faith into action through the regular practice of the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy, all of which helps to keep building up God’s Kingdom here among us.

So, again, today is a perfect time to ask ourselves if we have our priorities straight? Is our value system consistent with the Values of Jesus, and the Teachings of the Church? And if our lives are not rooted in the Teachings of Jesus and His Church, then in what, or in whom, are they rooted?

In the Gospel for today’s Feast, we heard the exchange between Pilate and Jesus on the night before Jesus would be crucified. Pilate, as the ruler of the temporal order, or “the kingdom of this world”, was trying to exert his power over Jesus, the King of the Universe.

That dialogue back and forth about who Jesus really was, if he was truly a King, and what “Truth” is, and isn’t, could very well be a similar “dialogue” that’s going on in our own day and time---in the “kingdom” of this world. Our Society seems to keep making more strident efforts to try to discredit what might be called “traditional values” in favor of a “value-less” society; to be a place where everyone gets to determine their own “right and wrong”; to create a social system where there’s no objective Truth, but where there’s only “my truth” and “your truth”; and that, of course, leads to “no truth”. Pilate was only able to understand “authority and power” from his own experience. To him, it meant force, it meant imposing his will on others. He simply couldn’t understand when Jesus said: *“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.”*

My brothers and sisters, what distinguishes US from Pilate---and the “Pilates” of our time---is precisely this: we are different from them IF we listen----really listen---to the Voice of Jesus. IF we Value His teachings. IF we pay attention to His Voice and live our lives as closely as we can according to His Word, and His teachings, no matter what other “voices” might be calling us, tempting us, or trying to distract us. Do we have the courage of our convictions? Do we protect the precious Gift of human life? Do we value the dignity of the human person? Do we stand up for the stability of Sacramental Marriage? Do we understand that we share in the responsibility of protecting the oppressed, the vulnerable, and the marginalized members of our society? IF we do, then we stand with Jesus, the “Truth”, and we are part of His Kingdom. That being said, no one who professes Jesus as their King can at the same time promote violence, hatred, revenge, or racist or prejudiced actions. One who stands with Jesus will always make every effort to speak the Truth in Love. Truth will always stand courageously before those in power in the “kingdoms of this world”.

As we’re all well-aware, we live in a world where half-truths and distortions of the truth reign supreme. Our airwaves and social media are filled with made-up facts and unqualified opinions, which means that we have difficulty knowing who and what to believe. What we DO know for sure is that Jesus IS the Truth, as He is also the Way and the Life. And ONLY when we know that can we truly and joyfully celebrate this Feast, acclaiming Jesus as the King of the World, and the King of our Lives.

As we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving, and get ready for a new Liturgical Year; as we go about our daily activities, do our jobs, raise our families, and participate fully in our society; let us pray that as we celebrate this Feast of Christ the King, we will realize that we are closer to the Truth today than we were this time last year, but not as close, we hope and pray, as we will be in the years to come.

And in that Truth, let us joyfully proclaim for all the world to hear: *“For the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are Yours, now and forever. Amen.”*