

Feast of Christ the King

This feast day is relatively new, less than 100 years old. Pope Pius XI was the one who established it, at least in part because he felt it important to remind the nations that, even though the papacy no longer ruled over a territory, the Church remained important, more important than the political realms surrounding it. After all, the Church's ruler was Christ the King, the Ruler of the Universe.

And the pope had a point. It was a reminder to all the other realms of Europe, but more importantly, it's a reminder to us about what's really important in life.

In the Gospel Pilate asks "Are you the King of the Jews?" The question already betrays a very Roman way of looking at things. For Rome, Israel was just another province of the empire. Rome called it Palestine, and for Rome, that was where the Jews lived and the Jews had a king. And that king needed to know to be subservient to Rome.

Jesus sidesteps the question. He admits to being a king, but does not limit himself to the political definition. He's about much larger things—a realm that goes beyond political rule and encompasses all of creation, and the reign of the One who holds all the nations in his hand.

Ultimately, that's the point of this feast. There is an ultimate kingdom that we are called to pledge our allegiance to: the kingdom of God.

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The king of this realm defines his kingdom as the one in which the greatest is the one who is most dedicated to serving others. It's the realm where the strongest have no need to coerce the weak because those who seek the truth about life will fall in love with God's own Son and stake their lives on the freedom he offers.

The people who choose to belong to the realm of Christ the King know that their primary identity comes from the God who loves us all.

Their citizenship papers are the baptismal certificates that entrust them with the mission to live by and spread the values of God's kingdom.

Because they see Christ as the king of the universe, they assume care for all of creation as an integral part of their mission.

Pope Francis gives us the 21st century version of the religious vision Pope Pius XI was aiming at when he established this feast: He calls us to invest ourselves for the purpose of bringing others to the liberation that membership in the kingdom of God brings with it, and recognizes that the influence of this kingdom cannot be limited to place and time, or private life versus public witness.

In celebrating this feast we commit ourselves to the struggle to bring the truth and freedom of God's reign to bear all across the board—not by coercion but by the witness of selfless love and

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service.