

Today we celebrate the great Feast of Christ the King, also known as the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, “King of the Universe.” Even just the title of today’s Feast is so provocative and instructive for us. We see the provocative nature of this title on full display in today’s Gospel, which I have to say is one of my favorite passages and if you’ve ever seen Mel Gibson’s 2004 classic, *The Passion of the Christ*, today’s Gospel is depicted so well and so powerfully in that film.

Notice that in the exchange between Pontius Pilate and Jesus, our Lord *never denies* that He is a king, but rather He *embraces* the title, seeking to explain to Pontius Pilate what type of king He actually is. Because in first-century Roman Palestine, the term “Messiah” or “King of the Jews” would’ve been understood and interpreted by many, as an extremely provocative and politically charged title.

The Jews of Jesus’ time would’ve understood this title to refer to some long-awaited religious-political figure who would lead an armed, military rebellion against the Romans in order to reestablish the Davidic kingdom in all of its earthly glory and splendor. And so the Romans would’ve interpreted this title as an inherently criminal and subversive

title, referring to a revolutionary who would challenge the rule of Caesar and his empire. So throughout His public ministry and especially in today's Gospel, Jesus is trying to dispel *both* interpretations of His kingship. This is why He explicitly tells Pontius Pilate in today's Gospel that "My kingdom does not belong to this world." And when Pilate tries to pin him down on the question of whether or not He's a king, Jesus responds, "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."

So what does it even mean when we proclaim that Christ is the "King of the Universe?" Well first, we shouldn't misunderstand Jesus' identity as King of the Universe as some sort of mythical, fairy-tale where Jesus is some fictional character Who controls everything and rules with an iron fist—that's not Who Jesus is. Secondly, Sacred Scripture tells us that the universe was created *through Christ and for Christ*. And yet His kingdom is not an earthly kingdom brought about by military conquest and defined by raw political power. Rather, Christ's Kingdom is *first and foremost in Heaven*, and it is a kingdom

of perfect peace, joy, truth, and justice—a kingdom where authentic freedom and happiness flourish. And in an absolutely unique way, Christ the King embodies His own Kingdom. Where Jesus is, *there* is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Brothers and sisters, if we truly immerse ourselves in the fundamental reality of Jesus's identity as "King of the Universe," then practically speaking, our lives will be totally changed and transformed forever! If we affirm that Christ is the King of the universe then we wouldn't place *all* of our hope in any one politician, celebrity, athlete, guru, etc.--we wouldn't look to these imperfect figures for our eternal salvation and treat them as "our own little messiahs" who have come to save us. Certainly other human beings can inspire us and be exemplary role-models for us, such as our family, friends, and the saints, but *only* Christ is King and *only He can save us*.

If Christ is truly King, then people wouldn't put political partisanship over discipleship. If Christ is King then we will make Him first in our lives and not look for eternal happiness and salvation in politics, business, entertainment, sports, and technology. As good,

necessary, and legitimate as those things are from a temporal perspective, in reality, they're not going to save us from sin and death, nor are they are going to perfectly satisfy us and give us the eternal happiness, peace, and freedom that we crave. And this is coming from a political science major with an Iphone who loves movies and sports.

As we enter the Christmas shopping season, we have to remember that *Christ* is King, *He* is the “Reason for the Season,” and *only He* can give us the “gift that keeps on giving” and that is eternal freedom and salvation. No matter how much we love giving gifts at Christmas, which is certainly a good and legitimate expression of our love for others, there is no material product “at half off” that could ever give us what Christ the King gives us—and that is forgiveness for our sins and eternal salvation from sin and death. Brothers and sisters, we need to have the proper perspective in this life and that perspective is the theological virtue of faith, which enables us to see reality as it is in its fullness, within the context of salvation history.

Furthermore, if we affirm that Christ is King of the universe then we wouldn't irrationally root our *entire Catholic faith* in any one pope,

bishop, priest, deacon, or lay person. If we acknowledge with every fiber of our being that Christ is the King of the Universe, then we *would* root our entire Catholic faith *in Him* and in the mission and identity of *His* Church. If Christ is King of the universe and we root our entire faith in Him, then we wouldn't allow the sins and crimes of others to destroy our Catholic faith! If we affirm that Christ is King, then we would embrace the universal Church that *He* established in order to proclaim His salvation to all the peoples of the earth.

In fact, the word “catholic” is derived from the ancient Greek word, “Katholikos,” which simply means “universal.” So when we say, the “Catholic” Church, we’re really saying the “universal” Church around the world that Christ Himself, the King of the Universe, established in order to foreshadow His Heavenly Kingdom that would encompass people from all nations, races, languages, backgrounds, etc.

Brothers and sisters, our Catholic faith is not rooted in self-deluded wishful thinking or in unstable, personal feelings that subjectively come and go by the minute. Rather our faith is rooted in objective, universal truth and reality, which is totally embodied in the Divine Person of our

Lord Jesus Christ! In today's Gospel, we hear our merciful Savior affirm His kingship saying, "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." Notice what Jesus does *not* say—He *never* says, "I came into the world to testify to *My truth*" or "everyone who has *their own truth* listens to my voice." #ThingsJesusNeverSaid. Rather, He clearly says "I came into the world to testify to *the truth*. Everyone who belongs to *the truth* listens to *my* voice." These words are in perfect accord with our Savior's declaration that He *is* the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no one comes to Father *except through* Him.

Brothers and sisters, Christ the King, *is Truth itself* and *not just any truth*, but the *Truth that sets us free and satisfies every desire of our heart and mind*. If our whole life is firmly anchored in the solid foundation of Christ the King, Who *is Truth itself*, then we *should never be afraid*. If we allow Christ the King to reign in our hearts and minds then we won't allow anything in this world to tear us down and destroy our faith, hope, and love. By virtue of our baptism, we share in

Christ's Kingship and so if we allow the Lord to reign in our hearts, then we will reign *with Him* in His Heavenly Kingdom.

On this great Solemnity, I'd like to close with the final words of the many Mexican Catholics who were brutally killed by the thousands under the atheistic Calles regime in late 1920s Mexico. These martyrs, many of whom were priests, women, and children, fearlessly went to their deaths exclaiming: "Viva Cristo Rey!"—"Long live Christ the King!"