

Today we celebrate the great Feast of Christ the King, also known as the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, “King of the Universe.”

Today’s Feast formally marks the end of the Church’s liturgical year and honestly this Feast always fascinates me because of the absolutely unique nature of Christ’s Kingship. Our Lord Jesus is really not your stereotypical “king” in the earthly sense as many may understand the identity of a king in the context of human history and popular culture.

The King of the Universe doesn’t rule with an iron fist nor does He govern as a tyrant with some selfish desire for power and domination. Our Savior’s Kingdom doesn’t even belong *primarily* to this fallen world but rather to another world, a Heavenly realm. Our King’s throne is a *wooden cross*, which in His time was considered a humiliating instrument of torture and death. Our King’s crown consists of *thorns* that painfully pierce one’s flesh. Our King doesn’t conquer through violence or a lust for power, but rather He conquers through heroic, self-sacrificing love and humility. Our King doesn’t identify Himself with powerful courtiers or other monarchs—rather He identifies Himself with the lowly, the marginalized, the weak, the forgotten, and the rejected.

In today's Gospel, our eternal King does something extraordinary. Our Lord Jesus says, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me." These powerful words confirm and magnify the nature of Jesus' Incarnation—the fact that God became a human being—that God truly became one of us. And out of His boundless love for the human race, it honestly wasn't enough for God to become *one of us*, but He also desired to become *one with us*.

In today's Gospel, the Son of the living God essentially *equates himself* with individual human beings. Not only did the Son of God become *one of us*, but He lovingly identifies Himself *with us, most especially with the "least among us"* such as the poor, the hungry, the sick, the suffering, the dying, the outcast, and *yes even the imprisoned*. Of course, Christ the King loves *all humanity, regardless of who you are*, with a perfect and infinite love. Yet out of His great mercy, our Savior has a special tenderness for those whom our fallen world loves to avoid—in other words, our great King *most especially* embraces those whom our society seems to reject.

Brothers and sisters, human beings possess a unique and intrinsic dignity for many fundamental reasons. First and foremost, every human person is lovingly created in the image and likeness of the Triune God. And yet, it wasn't enough for God to create us in His image, but out of His overabundant love for us and His desire to save us from sin and death, God becomes one of us in the Incarnation and thereby Christ *elevates our human dignity* to an even greater magnitude. God never chose to become an angel, an animal, or a plant—rather He chose to become a human being, thereby raising the dignity of the human person above and beyond every other creature in existence.

Lastly, given today's Gospel of Christ the King equating Himself with individual human beings, especially the "least among us," God is profoundly reminding us of the infinite dignity of the human person and therefore our basic moral duty before our neighbor, before each person—that *every person*, from conception until natural death, should be loved, accepted, respected, cared for, and embraced as if we were encountering God Himself. Because you see brothers and sisters, what

the Lord is trying to tell us in today's Gospel is that *how we love and treat others is how we love and treat Jesus Himself.*

Sadly we turn on the news or go online and we're bombarded by so many horrific violations of human dignity: from the barbaric evils of mass shootings, abortion-on-demand, terrorism, sexual assault, rape, gang violence, and bullying, to the degradation of human trafficking, pornography, and sexual abuse and harassment in which human beings are selfishly reduced to sexual objects that are used for one's pleasure. The alarming prevalence of sexual abuse, assault, and harassment in our society should disturb *all of us* and cause our culture to seriously rediscover the authentic truth, goodness, and beauty of human sexuality in the context of human dignity.

Contrary to our culture's fallen tendencies, human dignity is not measured or determined by one's productivity, usefulness, material possessions, physical or mental abilities, or physical appearance—no, human dignity is determined *solely* by one's existence—*by the fact that every person has been lovingly created and redeemed by God.* Brothers and sisters, human beings possess intrinsic and infinite dignity *because*

they reflect Divinity. This is exactly why love of God and love of neighbor are *inseparable*. God lovingly identifies Himself *with our neighbor* and comes to meet us *in our neighbor*—in the people in our daily lives! The Lord is *especially present* in the weakest, most vulnerable, and most marginalized among us.

As we enter the Christmas shopping season, which is not intrinsically evil, we have to guard against a materialistic and consumerist mindset that can neglect the most important things in life. Indeed today's Gospel is a great reminder that when we die, we won't be judged by how much material stuff we have or how much money we have. Rather, we'll be judged by how much we loved Christ and our neighbor and more specifically, how much we loved Christ *in and through our neighbor, especially* in the least among us.

So brothers and sisters, on this great Feast of Christ the King, as we prepare to worship and thank our Savior in the Most Holy Eucharist for the great gift of salvation, let's invite Him to reign as King of our hearts so that in our daily lives we can see Him and love Him in those around us, especially the least among us.