

Homily - Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Today marks a turning point in the life and prayer of the Church.

This week, we come to the conclusion of the old liturgical year, and will begin a new one as we enter into the season of Advent.

And with this turning point, today we celebrate a feast with a beautiful, and rather impressive title:

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

We speak so often of Christ in his identity as the King of Kings - it's a title that rolls off our tongues so easily in so many prayers and conversations - but I think it's always worth reflecting on the fact that kingship, per se, is a concept that is still somewhat alien to most of our experiences.

After all, you might say that our nation's independent existence is owed to a forceful rejection of a human kingship that was deemed unworthy and unsuitable.

But the idea of kingship still persists, and has deep roots in Western culture itself, reaching back to ancient times.

Centuries before the time of Christ's own Incarnation, the philosopher Plato imagined a world in which the perfect ruler would be a philosopher-king, a figure who blended wisdom with worldly power.

I don't think it's a stretch to see the fulfillment of that longing in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is revealed by Scripture as Wisdom itself, personified and ruling eternally in heaven.

In fact, in modern times, we still hear echoes of that longing.

For as much as we have rejected the rule of human authorities, the theme of kingship still has a powerful resonance even today.

One of the greatest classics of 20th-century Catholic literature contains, as a central plot thread, the hopeful desire for the revelation of a long-lost ruler who will restore his homeland to its old glory and cast out the evil which infests it.

I am speaking, of course, of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, especially its third part, titled, appropriately, *The Return of the King*.

Tolkien, a devout Catholic, wrote his fantasy worlds infused with this Christian worldview, one which is never complete without giving voice to our own hope and desire to see the kingdom of Jesus Christ brought to full realization in this life.

I think we also see that desire become wrongly directed in the frustrated way so many people attach their identities and hopes to limited and broken political causes and figures, seeking a substitute in this life for the kingship that we hope to know in its glory in the next.

But there cannot be any true king, any perfect ruler, any incarnation of wisdom outside of the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King of all Kings.

In *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council's constitution on the Church, we are told, "While it slowly grows, the Church strains toward the completed Kingdom and, with all its strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with its King."

We each long for that reunion with our Savior, whether we realize it or not.

The process of conversion, of turning our hearts toward the one whom they were meant to adore from the beginning of time, is to allow this king to conquer us not by force of arms or economic compulsion, but by the invitation of his merciful love.

His Kingdom is revealed among us now in so many hidden ways, and yet it is easily missed because of its humility.

In the Gospel, there is one quality that separates those who will belong to the Kingdom of God from those who will be cast out - and simply put, it is that the citizens of the Kingdom are the ones who learn to recognize and love him in his hidden presence.

And yes, for all his glory, Christ is still hidden in his humility even as he invites us to accept the offer of his kingship in our hearts.

He is hidden, as he says, behind what Saint Teresa of Calcutta would call his 'distressing disguise' in the woundedness and needs of the poor, who struggle without the love and support they are owed in our charity.

He is hidden in his Eucharistic presence here in the sacraments, and yet goes unnoticed and unloved in the tabernacles of his parishes.

His kingship is rejected in society as it turns more and more away from the moral laws of his Gospel which transcends any worldly power.

In all of these places, the Lord calls out to us - let Jesus Christ be king in our hearts and in our lives once again, or for the very first time.

Let him be the one to renew, rebuild, and restore that which is broken, and heal a world that cries out for a savior.

It is easy to look at any one of these places of brokenness and think - there's no way I do anything in my own life to make a difference.

There are too many needs to fill. There are too many obligations pulling me away from prayer. There are too many forces in the world turning it away from God.

That's the beauty of Christ's invitation - we don't have to try to be kings ourselves, carving out our own tiny slice of power and prestige to try to solve all of humanity's problems, and we would be doomed to failure if we tried.

No, he is inviting us to something better - as the language of the Second Vatican Council puts it, to share by our baptism in Christ's own kingship as he renews his Church, and through us, the world itself.

And, so, as we come to this turning point and the beginning of a new year of prayer, we must begin with this question: what would your life look like if Jesus Christ was truly king?

What would change? Where would you begin to order your priorities, your time, your life and your heart itself toward loving him in his hidden presence?

Pray courageously about that question.

The Kingdom of God is among us, and he desires to be King in our hearts as well.

And when you recognize a place in which he has not yet renewed your own life, don't be afraid to let him in - to invite him to continue that work of renewal, and prepare you to inherit the kingdom that awaits us in the life to come.

Today, as we receive him now in this Blessed Sacrament, invite him to be king in your heart as well, to prepare you in this life to live with him forever in eternity, and pray that we will one day hear those joyful words:

"Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."