

SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE KING, B
THE KING WITH A DIFFERENCE

“Are you the King of the Jews? ... Mine is not a kingdom of this world; if My Kingdom were of this world, my men would have fought against my being surrendered to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this kind.”

The Art Speaks: There is a painting by the famous artist Adolf Menzel (1815-1905) in the Berlin Art Gallery that significantly speaks to us about the celebration of this day. It is supposed to be a painting of King Frederick of Germany talking to his generals. But it is partially finished. Menzel painstakingly painted the generals first, placing them around the outside of the painting as a background and leaving a bare patch in the middle of the painting for the King. But Menzel died before he could finish the painting. So, there is a painting full of generals but no king. The feast of Christ, the Universal King, which we celebrate today, among other things, draws our attention to the fact that in our lives, we often spend much time enthroning the generals of insignificance and postpone inviting Jesus the King of Kings into our hearts till the last moment which is quite uncertain. We remind ourselves today of the importance of having Christ at the centre of our lives to rule as King of all that we do.

The Feast of Christ the King: The celebration of the feast of the Solemnity of Christ the King was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 in his encyclical *Quas Prima* in response to the growing nationalism and secularism of the world of the time. The Pope declared: “*Pax Christi in regno Christi*” (The peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ) and proclaimed the sovereignty of Christ over all governments and kingdoms of the world. Today, the message of universal kingship and peace of Christ is as relevant as it was, if not more. Our world cries under the scourge of wars and conflicts; ideologies of secularism, relativism, individualism, and a culture of indifference have become endemic and institutionalised to the neglect of the principles of the kingdom inaugurated by Christ more than two thousand years ago.

The Son of Man is King: The Readings of today expectedly connect to the celebration. In the First Reading (Dan. 7: 13-14), the “Son of Man”, an Old Testament title that prefigures Christ, is “conferred all sovereignty, glory and kingship.” A kingship that makes “all peoples, nations and languages become His servant” in a reign that shall last forever. “His sovereignty is an eternal sovereignty which shall never [pass away, nor His empire is ever destroyed. The description of the “Son of Man” and His Kingdom here succinctly points to a King robed with divine authority to reign in eternity. Thus, every knee shall bend before Him, and every tongue confesses that He is Lord (Phil. 2: 10,11). The Second Reading from the Book of Revelations (Rev. 1: 5-8) uses a similar expression to describe the coming of the “Son of Man”, who is Jesus Himself: “Coming from the clouds of heaven.” This text is both a fulfilment, a revelation, and a confirmation. It fulfils the vision of Daniel

(Dan. 7) about the Son of Man; reveals the identity of the “Son of Man” as Jesus; and confirms His return as King; “the One who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1: 8). Therefore, there is neither doubt nor confusion as to who the Son of Man is and the fact that He is King, “ruler of the kings of the earth” and the universe.

The King with a Difference: “Are you the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked Jesus. Pilate must have expected an affirmative or negative response from Jesus. But he got more than he anticipated – a brief discourse on the nature of His kingdom that would leave him and the rest of humanity in wonder and amazement. “Mine is not a kingdom of this world; if My Kingdom were of this world, my men would have fought against my being surrendered to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this kind.” How so true this is! The Kingdom inaugurated by Christ was not to rival the Roman political power, nor any of the earthly kingdoms. It was/is a Kingdom with a difference. In Christ’s kingdom, the King must be a servant (Matt. 20: 28), washing the feet of his slaves (Jn. 13: 3-15); he must lay down His life for His sheep (Jn. 10: 11); the king is a compassionate, caring and selfless master, who suffers with, feeds, heals and strengthens the weak entrusted to him. The nature of his kingdom is parallel to what obtains in the kingdoms of this world. In this kingdom: the operative principle is love; the guidelines are the beatitudes, and its justice is the truth.

We Are Challenged: The celebration of Christ the Universal King challenges us first and foremost to accept Christ as our King, the King of our lives. We must make Him the centre of all we do – “The Alpha and the Omega” of our actions. This implies that we submit to His teachings and abide by the rule of life He offers, which is the love of God and neighbour. If Christ is our King, we are His subjects, this demands humility before Him and obedience to Him.

This celebration challenges us to revisit and review our concept of power and authority from domination to service, from selfishness to people-centredness; from injustice to justice; from falsification of facts to truth. Those in power must learn from Christ, the humble good shepherd, who, instead of making His authority felt, came to serve and not be served. Leadership, power, the authority should be seen as privileges for service to the people and not as a right to oppress the weak and suppress the poor.

My dear friends, let us thank God Who has guided us with His Word and Sacraments, providing grace upon grace as we journeyed through the seasons of the Church liturgical year ending this week. Let us pray that His Word may find a home in us. As a lesson from the painting by Menzel, let us seek first to have Christ at the centre of our lives before we consider the other insignificant generals, who will only make our lives incomplete.