

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is the beginning of the busiest time of the year.... Out there, we barely catch our breath for a national time to give Thanks, before we almost get swept away in the tidal rush toward Christmas. But for the church, today marks not a beginning, but an end with the Feast Day of Christ the King.

William Shakespeare asks, "What's in a name?" Well, at the outset, the title "Christ the King" seems to us moderns a bit outdated. After all, we elect officials at every governmental level, and even our bishops. To the ears of non-Jewish, first-century Christians, the word "christ" is the equivalent of "lord" or "emperor", and neither of these titles seem enlightened or modern.

A good deal of our difficulty lies in the fact that we compartmentalize our lives into two separate realities, rather like the separation of church and state. There is the world of daily practical living, of politics and jobs and school and work, of friends and relatives, of those to whom we relate and those with whom we have no contact or, even worse, look down on. And then, there is our religious life, which is about such things as doing good, spirituality, church, saying prayers and listening to this homily. Because this is true, we might understand a Feast of Christ the Religious Leader or Christ the Guru, but not Christ unto whom every knee shall bow.

The first Christian creed was expressed in a few words. "Jesus is Lord." That is it. "Christ the King." Confine Jesus to the role of a religious leader, someone who went around saying nice things and performing miracles, and he becomes just another good man, like many others. Elijah said good things, performed miracles and healed, but Elijah is not king.

In the Old Testament we read that the people wanted a king but were warned that a king would be partial, corrupt and a bad idea. They persisted and got Saul, who was partial and corrupt. David later succeeded him, and despite his very modern notorious sin of adultery, he became for the Jews of his time and thereafter the example of a good, wise and heroic king, anointed by God.

In Jesus, all humanity is redeemed and made new through Jesus. We are made new, if we allow it in the first place. However the word "we" does not mean you and I as individuals caught up in some other-worldly spiritual reality, lived side by side with the reality of life. A restored humanity is part of a restored world.

We are not...or should not be a holy club devoted to changing society, feeding the hungry, attacking discrimination and injustice...although Christians do all those things, or should do. If you are a Christian, you exist to tell the world that it belongs to God....not to us, not to Wall Street, not to nation states, but really and truly to God. We exist to tell the world that it has an anointed Monarch, Jesus the

Lord.

The early Christians were not persecuted because they believed that Jesus was their religious leader and in the light of his teaching they did good things. As long as you admitted that Caesar was Lord, the Romans were remarkably tolerant of religious diversity...and essentially left them alone. But, what could not be tolerated was the simple claim that Jesus is Lord, threatening imperial political authority. It said bluntly that as Jesus is Lord, because God reigns, everything not only has its origin in God, but is subject to God's will.

The first "Followers of the Way" were not subversives because they refused to acknowledge legitimate political power. The earliest church taught that Christians should respect the powers that be, obey the law and even pay taxes. But they WERE subversive because they believed that legitimate power was passing, was relative, and ultimately judged by a higher power, the power of Jesus...that there are not two compartmentalized realities, worldly and spiritual, but one reality, the Kingdom of God, which, as Jesus says, is from above and is all in all.

In a vital sense, what we are all called to do in this place, on this day, is recognize that fact. We are drawn through worship, the act of showing God what God is worth, into the ultimate reality of God, as we bow the knee to Jesus and anticipate that moment to be, when we join with the hosts of heaven and the redeemed of a new earth in hailing the sovereignty of God. That is how Holy Scripture begins in Genesis and ends in the Book of the Revelation.

This seemingly impractical acknowledgement that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is therein" empowers and enables us to engage in the work of God in our communities, as God claims them, and restores them into God's image. We then can go on to engage in what our church terms "the Marks of Mission". The "Marks of Mission" are identified in telling about Jesus; in caring for people in their need; in fighting for justice; in announcing forgiveness and mercy, and being enabled and empowered to live as the church as Christians. That is because we should know just who is boss, whose realm this bit of territory we call parish is. Unless we get this right, Christianity and this church is merely a compartment of life, a club for do-gooders who enjoy a religious experience.

What seems something apart and impractical...the taking of bread and breaking it, taking a cup and blessing it, eating and drinking, hearing scripture...is merely religious self-indulgence unless its context is our representing all of creation in acknowledging the Kingship of Jesus, in whose sacrifice on the cross and alienated world is restored to its author and creator, God.

We may sing, "At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow. Every tongue confess him, King of Glory now," but unless in this great hymn we became united in the love song that rings throughout the cosmos, and admit our utter dependence on God and his Jesus, we merely enjoy membership of a group of people who gather on Sunday mornings...perhaps enjoyable, even inspiring, but of no ultimate reality.

So, today, forget the utility of Christianity. Forget what the greater church is good at doing or not good at doing, its strengths and purpose, its failures and weakness, and let us concentrate on that which is ultimate.

“All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee,” as we offer bread from the earth, wine from the vine, money from our accounts....but most of all, our hearts in a cry of allegiance and submission to God in Jesus, through whom all things were and are made, and to whom all creation ultimately returns.

We give thanks and praise for the one whose example, in life and spirit, leads us...as our king...to transformation in life now, and before judgment to come, all in the name of God as the Father, and the as Son, and as the Holy Spirit.

Amen.