

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King

November 24, 2024

As you know, the Church calendar is not put together by accident. No - the Church constructs it in such a way as to lead us on a sacred journey. From the miraculous birth of Jesus and his short, public ministry, through his heart-wrenching passion, death, and resurrection, through the transforming experience of Pentecost and the early days of the Christian community, all the way to this very day - the last Sunday of the Liturgical Year. Next week, we begin the season of Advent (Can you believe it?), we hit a sort of re-set button and start the journey all over, a journey on which St. Luke will accompany us. (Where has the time gone?)

But because today is a kind of “end” in itself, it seems appropriate that today would be a day of recollection, a day of remembering, a day of looking back and recalling where we were a year ago and where we are today. And the Church chooses one particular focus for this day, one reality to celebrate - Our Lord Jesus, Christ the King.

And believe me, this is not some kind of afterthought, not something the Church feels it needs to wedge into the

calendar somehow, someday. No, the Solemnity of Christ the King is an invitation and call for you and for me to truly think about the place of Jesus in our hearts, our minds and our lives. Our faith is founded not on a set of ideas, but on a person, the person of Jesus, our brother, our Lord, our friend, indeed our Savior, and yes, our King.

Brothers and sisters in the Catholic Faith, please how are we doing? How are we doing in this faith journey?

I don't know about you, but the life of a Christian can seem a little overwhelming. One of the central tenets of our faith is the call, the expectation, the command, that we are to love everyone, in every time and every place, and indeed in every situation. Old and young. Rich and poor. People we like, and those we don't. Friends and enemies alike. And it's not easy. It is a challenge each of us struggles with over a lifetime.

But though we try to accept the command to love, we know that we don't have the exact same responsibilities to everyone. We just don't. And so parents do not have the same responsibilities toward their children that they do toward a casual acquaintance who lives a few blocks away. And spouses owe more to each other than they do

to their co-workers or friends. And pastors have to look out for their own flock before most others.

Sometimes I like to think of the image of concentric circles, each circle reflecting the degree to which we have to be invested in and committed to and responsible for the people within a particular circle. And so spouses and children would be close to the center.

Friends would be in a circle a little bit further out. People who are all alone in this world would probably be a little closer in, while those with really solid support systems (those with lots of friends and family) would be more on the fringes. You get the idea. And making these choices is not easy. Everyone's life and situations and relationships are completely different. There is no "one size fits all" when we construct these diagrams in our minds. Figuring out who we are most responsible for and to what degree is part of what it means to be human. And yet, today invites us to ask some important questions. Where is Jesus in this diagram? In what circle does he belong? Or does he get his own circle? Is the King all by himself?

In some ways, it's sort of a "tricky" question. Our quick knee-jerk response might be to say, "Of course He has to

be at the center. Loving Jesus is what it's all about. Nothing tops that." And we would be right. But as you've heard me say a hundred times before, love of God IS love of neighbor. They are not separate things. We can't somehow love God while treating the men and women in our lives poorly, or unkindly, or unjustly. Faith doesn't work that way. We'd like it to, but it doesn't. No, for the truly faithful person, love of God manifests itself in only ONE way - in love of one another. And not a diluted kind of love, but a deep, unconditional, unyielding kind of love, the kind of love that says, "I choose to love you no matter what, no matter whether you love me or not."

And so, recognizing Christ as Our King doesn't mean putting him at the center of our lives in some sort of vague way (demanding little of us), but rather putting him at the center of every relationship, at the center of every encounter, at the center of every experience and every situation in which we find ourselves. When Jesus truly is our King we will bring him with us into every circle in our diagram, reflecting his love and goodness in the way we treat our spouses and children, our friends, our enemies, and everyone in-between.

In a very real sense, when Jesus truly is Our King, each of our circles of responsibility get a little larger, as we choose to increase our acts of kindness and mercy toward more and more men and women in our little corner of the world, choose to love a little more often, a little more completely, a little more without counting the cost. “And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make.”

My dear friends, we're at the end of another Liturgical or Church Year. And we need to examine where we are at. Were we better “lovers” over this past year? Did our commitment to Christ Our King spill over to giving more and loving more and being more?

Or are we just loyal subjects in word alone? I wonder.

Long live Christ the King!