

**Christ the King
November 22, 2020**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.**

AMEN

This is the last Sunday of the Church Year...and, very differently from the secular world, the church calendar begins all over again, not on January 1, but on the first Sunday of Advent, which is next Sunday. Therefore, it is especially important that we tune into the message of this last Sunday in our church calendar. // Today is known as Christ the King Sunday and the sovereignty, the kingship of our Lord is the theme.

Just as an overview of how we arrived at this Sunday, with this theme: As I said, our CHURCH year begins with Advent...a time of preparation and repentance as we approach the gift of Christ at Christmas./ We then move to Epiphany or the 12th day of Christmas... a day when we celebrate that those who are wise still seek the Lord and prayerfully find him./ The church year then moves on to the serious penitential season of Lent and Holy Week, where we remember the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ... but then we move to the season of Easter and all its promises of a resurrected life. / 50 days later we celebrate Pentecost, when the power of the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and empowered them to go, Publish Glad Tidings of the Good News of God in Christ... and to BEGIN to BE the CHURCH...the BODY OF CHRIST.

All of that takes us to about the beginning of June, and from then until today we have had scripture readings that focused on LIVING OUT that Good News about the life and teachings of Jesus. So, the church year is roughly divided in half...with the first half focusing on the EVENTS in our Lord's life...and the second half focusing on how WE APPLY all we have learned about his life and his teachings, to living OUR lives as people who call ourselves Christians.

If we welcome Jesus into our lives, there is a never- ending encounter between our Lord and our humanity. It is in this way that Jesus well may become Lord of our lives. We constantly try to learn who Jesus really is, in our worship, in Holy Scripture, in our own lives. We ask if he really IS King of our own lives.

May we hear our Lord speaking to us and hear his truth. For that truth will set us free, free to have life and have it abundantly, free to know the joy of serving others in his holy name. Free to know that the kingdom of God ultimately is within. Free to know peace that passes all understanding. This is the truth our Lord and Savior came into the world to share with us.

Today's Gospel brings the kingship of Christ to us with uncomfortable questions. Where do you and I stand in terms of his royal claims?...that he is Lord over all...KING over our entire lives? What do the entries in our checkbook say about where we stand? What we value? About who or what gets our allegiance? About how much we love the Lord and bow before him? OR DON'T.////////

Therefore, it is reasonable, indeed, WISE, that on this last Sunday before we begin our church year all over again, that we would have this opportunity to focus on Jesus Christ as King over all...to seriously consider whether this is true for us. Is he, for us, the ruler over all things in our lives? Is it true for us that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow? Do we mean it when we sing "Crown Him with many

crowns for he is Lord of all?" Are we willing to cast our own crowns, whatever they may be, at his feet?// This is very serious. /// And it is very challenging. It is at the heart of what being a follower of Jesus is all about. He pretty much is saying "don't call yourself a Christian unless you are TRULY willing to follow me." Jesus tells us that whether or not we inherit the Kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world, has everything to do with how much we love him and how much we love our neighbor as ourselves, as He asks us to do. That is the Truth of which he speaks. That is true life in his kingdom. The Kingdom that is meant in The Lord's Prayer when we say, time and time again, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.'

The smallest acts of kindness done for even the seemingly least important of God's created beings are as if they are done for Jesus Christ Himself. Or - not done. Not doing what we can do to reach out to ease another's burden is as if we are neglecting Jesus Christ. For he says: how you treat others is how you are treating me. We cannot claim to love God, to be followers of Jesus Christ without being ever mindful of the needs of others...whom he also cares about.

Today's Gospel passage is a very weighty message, and, because it comes at the end of Jesus' teachings to his disciples, it suggests that it is intended as the last word...the summary of his teachings to his disciples, and therefore, to us who would follow him. In the last analysis, it is genuine, selfless Love that determines whether one is truly good or not...whether one is among the sheep or the goats...so to speak. There is no excuse for selfishness, no substitute for active Love. Remember how Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" And then He said, "Well, if you love me, feed my sheep."

We know Jesus was never interested in being a worldly King, but he WAS very much interested in bringing spiritual truth to the world. Hopefully the whole idea of Christ the King makes us think of the work to be done to make Christ the Lord and King of our own lives. And, perhaps in a society where too often power and money rule, the designation of this Sunday as Christ the King Sunday can point us to a way of joyful servanthood, modelled for us by Jesus. Seeing Jesus in all people, in all situations, keeps our Lord Jesus Christ with us at all times and in all places and encourages us to always seek His rule in our lives. Truly, "What would Jesus do?"

Today's scripture readings invite us to a very probing reflection. If we really believe that our lives are under the Lordship, the Kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said he came to live among us so that we would know the abundant life, then, what aspects of our lives are under His loving judgment right now? How often it is that the very thing, the very habit, the very pattern of our living which is not for our soul's health, is the very place where our Lord calls to us to let Him lead us in the paths of goodness, to let Him help us to know the JOY of the abundant life he has promised to those who truly follow Him as their Lord and Savior, the Ruler of their lives.

I love Irish poetry and Irish legends. They feed my soul; they help me hear God's word in my life. I would like to share this legend which came to mind as I pondered the message of our Gospel today. This one goes back to the time when kings ruled Ireland. I know I shared it with some of you once before, a few years ago, but maybe there are some new listeners. Besides...it is such a wonderful legend for us to ponder.

It seems that the reigning king had no child to succeed him on the throne. So he had his messengers post signs in every town and village of his kingdom, inviting qualified young men to apply for an interview with the king. This way the king hoped to be able to choose a successor before he died. Two

qualifications especially were stressed. First, the one chosen must have a deep love for God and second, he must show love for his neighbor.

The young man around whom this legend centers saw one of these signs that the king had had posted. He indeed felt that he had a deep love for God AND for neighbor, and he started to feel a kind of inner voice urging him to apply for an interview with the king. BUT the young man was so poor that he didn't even have decent clothes to wear to go before the king. He also had no provisions for the long journey to the king's castle.

So the young man prayed over the matter. Through his praying he felt led to BEG for the clothes and provisions he needed. So, Beg he did. Until finally everything was ready, and he set out. On and on he trekked. He rationed out his food and water and he slept under the stars. After about a month of travel, he finally caught sight of the king's castle. It sat high on a hill off in the distance. Clearly he had quite a way to go. Although the journey was long and hard, he wasn't discouraged.

At about the same time that he glimpsed the king's castle, he also caught sight of a poor old beggar sitting by the side of the road. The beggar held out his hands and pleaded for help. "I'm hungry and cold," he said in a weak voice. "Could you give me something warm to put on and something to eat?"

The young man was moved by the sight of the beggar. He stripped off his own warm outer clothes and EXCHANGED them for the tattered old coat of the beggar. He also gave him most of the provisions he had been carrying for his long journey.

Then....very uncertainly, he continued his journey and he walked on to the castle in TATTERED clothes and without any food for his return trip.

When the young man arrived at the castle, guards met him at the gate. They took him to the visitor's area. After a long wait, the young man was led in to see the king.

He bowed low before the throne. When he straightened up, the young man could hardly believe his eyes. He said to the king, "YOU were the beggar beside the road."

"That's right." Said the king.

"Why did you do this to me?" asked the young man.

"I had to find out," said the king, "if you really DO love God AND your neighbor.

Clearly for this king, loving God was to be lived out in caring and giving and sharing or you were not worthy to be a part of his kingdom.//////////

I hope you hear Christ OUR King in this legend. The Reign of Christ the King IS the Triumph of caring!

AMEN