



Artwork by Moya Hogarth

## SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE KING Year A 22.11.20

Ezk 34:11-12, 15-17; Ps 22:1-3, 5-6; 1 Cor 15:20-26, 28; Mt 25:31-46

Today we celebrate the solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. I emphasise those regal words. Are they anachronistic when most countries are republics, sometimes democracies? Towards the end of the Creed we shall say “and his kingdom will have no end”.

What is this feast and why do we celebrate it? What does it mean for each of us personally?

This feast was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925, as a considered response to warfare in the Near East, and to violent anti-Christian regimes in Russia, Mexico and Spain. Also, to the new fascist regime in Italy, a totalitarian state which required complete subordination of life and thought to it. The encyclical<sup>1</sup> that instituted the feast expressly referred back to Pius XI's first encyclical in 1922, which had attacked rampant materialism, secularism and extreme nationalism. Pope Pius sought the reChristianisation of society. He lamented the inordinate desire for pleasure, for possession, to rule or to domineer over others<sup>2</sup>; he lamented the refusal of governments to recognise that ultimately legitimate authority comes from God<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Quas Primas (QP)*

<sup>2</sup> *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio (UADC) 24*

<sup>3</sup> *UADC 28*

(noting that that refusal eroded respect for any political authority<sup>4</sup>); he lamented the entire secularisation of marriage in many states and the denial that marriage was instituted by God;<sup>5</sup> he lamented the tendency for God and for Jesus's teachings to be banished from schools, which consequently became openly atheistical and anti-religious.<sup>6</sup> He lamented the rivalry between nations.<sup>7</sup> Does any of this sound familiar?

So this feast emphasises that that Christ, Our Lord, not intellectual fashion or public opinion, must rule our thoughts and our lives.

The readings for this feast in this liturgical Year A dwell on particular attributes of kingship. The first duty of a king is to defend his subjects and protect them, in former times leading his army out to battle and giving his life there if necessary. As we hear in the epistle today, this king Christ will destroy death, and just as he was raised from the dead so shall we all be brought to life again in him.

As a shepherd tends his or her flock, this king defends and cares for his subjects. If we let him, he revives us when we are weary, he feeds and waters us and watches over us. He searches us out when we are lost. The beautiful and trusting responsorial psalm reminds us of this.

In her coronation oath in 1953 our Queen, Elizabeth II, promised to cause Law and Justice, in Mercy, to be executed in all her judgments. In the Gospel reading Jesus solemnly foretells the time when he will come in glory to judge how we are living our lives. This solemnity ushers in the last week of the Church's liturgical year and points to the end of time. In the next few days, we have dramatic and vivid readings from the Apocalypse at Mass; we have the disturbing Gospel readings in which Jesus foretells the destruction of Jerusalem, gives us the parable of the budding fig tree and tells us to stay awake. An optional hymn at the Office of Readings, Lauds and Vespers during the week is the *Dies Irae*.

The Gospel reading draws a stark contrast between the majesty of Jesus's coming at the end of time and the way in which he meets us now: hungry; thirsty; a stranger; sick; in prison. The standard of the Gospel is very different from the adulation of power, wealth, glamour and celebrity that we can see around us. The standard of the Gospel is how we have shown mercy to the poor, the weak and the oppressed. This King told us he came to serve, not to be served.<sup>8</sup> We need to live now as though we are in the last days. Jesus's kingdom is here, now.

This Sunday is also World Youth Day. The young normally have the advantage of being unencumbered by wealth or possessions; they are capable of much spontaneous love and altruism. Let us all be similarly young and generous at heart and in spirit.

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<sup>4</sup> QP19

<sup>5</sup> UADC 29

<sup>6</sup> UADC 30

<sup>7</sup> UADC 11-12

<sup>8</sup> Mt 20:28