

[Readings: Daniel 7:13-14; Ps. 93; Rev. 1:5-8; John 18:33b-37]

On the last Sunday of the liturgical year, Catholics celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King. A relative newcomer to the Church calendar -- established only 100 years ago -- this feast is designed to give special recognition to the dominion Christ our Lord has over all aspects of our lives. But why and how did it come about? And why is it so important?

When Cardinal Ambrogio Achille Ratti was elected pope and took the name Pope Pius XI, much of the world was in shambles. The year was 1922, and while the bloodletting of World War I (1914-1918) had ended, widespread peace and tranquility were not evident.

The “War to End All Wars” had been especially devastating to England and the countries of continental Europe. Governments were in economic chaos, unemployment was rampant and people in many places were starving to death.

Pessimism, a sense of helplessness compounded by hatred among the nations, was overwhelming. The time was ripe for the rise of tyrants, and rise they did. Pope Pius XI’s predecessor, Pope Benedict XV, had warned about this prophetically in 1920 when he wrote, “There can be no stable peace or lasting treaties, though made after long and difficult negotiations and duly signed, unless there be a return of mutual charity.”

The Book of Ecclesiastes says that “there is nothing new under the sun.” All of these things I just mentioned that happened 100 years ago are still happening in our world – and our country -- today.

In all these developments, the new Pope Pius XI saw that people were denying Christ in favor of a lifestyle dominated by secularism, material advantage and false hope created by the tyrants. He realized that he had to address the political and economic forces that were crowding out the kingship of Jesus. As a start, he dedicated his reign and motto as pope to “The Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ” (*Pax Christi in Regno Christi*). Pope Pius constantly emphasized the kingship of Christ as declared in the Creed: “His kingdom will have no end.”

On Dec. 11, 1925, the pope issued the encyclical *Quas Primas* (“In the First”) which added the feast of “Our Lord Jesus Christ the King” to the annual Church liturgical calendar. More than 340 religious leaders had asked for this feast day. In 1969, Pope Paul VI changed the name of the celebration to the feast we now know as “Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.” He also changed the date to the last Sunday in the liturgical year and its rank of celebration to that of a “solemnity.”

Today, peace still eludes us; social, political and economic orders are shaking; and the nations continue in many ways to reject the light of the Gospel. We can be grateful, then, for the chance to celebrate each year the Solemnity of Christ the King -- for the world needs now, more than ever, our witness to His rule over all things.

Sir Thomas Moore, sentenced to death by King Henry VIII of England, said on the day of his execution and martyrdom, “I die the King’s servant, but God’s servant first.”

What does His Kingship look like? Pope Benedict XVI says this: “It is not the power of the kings or the great people of this world; it is the divine power to give eternal life, to liberate from evil, to defeat the dominion of death. It is the power of Love that can draw well from evil that can melt a hardened heart, bring peace amid the harshest conflict and kindle hope in the thickest darkness.”

Calling Christ a king has always been problematic, particularly for Jesus Himself. Jesus was a servant leader whose main mission was to bring truth and show people the way to love. He used all of His power, all of His knowledge, to lift others up out of their despair, poverty, fear, and isolation. Humility was His signature style. Hardly what comes to mind when one thinks of a king.

To this day, leaders who lead with humility find it uncovers truth. Take the example of Jungkiu Choi, who in the early 2000s served as the head of consumer banking at Standard Chartered in China.

As Dan Cable tells the story in Harvard Business Review, Choi would visit branches unannounced and offer breakfast to the employees before the doors opened. Then he would hold huddles and solicit ideas from employees. This

revealed small obstacles that Choi could help address with improved training and upgraded technology. Also, the visits yielded many new and innovative ideas, which Choi allowed managers to act on. This accessible, respectful, humble management style proved to be a winning approach. Within two years, customer satisfaction increased by 54 percent and employee attrition was reduced to the lowest among all the foreign banks in China.

My friends, if we believe in the words of Jesus -- and that's the biggest *if* we'll ever be confronted with -- then all power over our lives belongs to Him and His reign, which has no end. Nothing on earth can challenge the authority of Jesus. Is He YOUR King?

If we find ourselves bowing our heads to another King or tipping our hats to a different Lord, we might ask ourselves why. Do we let the King of lies, of fear, worries, and anger, of resentments and unforgiveness, anxieties and despair reign in our hearts? The testimony of Jesus is truth, and His is the only authority that lasts.

Today we proudly proclaim Christ as our King. Jesus establishes His kingdom one heart at a time. That means we freely dispel sinful darkness from our hearts, by being loving, kind, and compassionate so as to reflect those qualities of Jesus.

A few decades ago, there was a newspaper cartoon series called "The Wizard of Id." It featured a dwarf-sized king, who usually was at odds with his people and his royal staff. One of his ministers runs into the royal throne room and shouts, "The peasants are revolting!" The king says with great judgement, "You can say THAT again!"

Does Jesus find US "revolting? Do we listen to Him? We know that His message is true, and so we respond. And in so doing we help Him create a Kingdom -- one heart and one life at a time -- that will not be destroyed. A Kingdom of hope, and a Kingdom of justice and peace for all.

This week, when you find yourself saying the "Our Father," stop at the word "Kingdom." Say "Thy Kingdom come IN me; Thy Kingdom come THROUGH me, Thy will be done."

The more that we live out our faith, the greater the grandeur of Christ our King will be revealed to the world. Will YOU become a partner in the service of the Kingdom of God?