

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Nov 22nd 2015

The Solemnity Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

“My kingdom does not belong to this world, If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here.”

For many years I had a negative reaction to this celebration of the feast of Christ the King. It seemed to me that the feast implied that the Church as Christ’s representative on earth was presenting herself as a triumphal institution on the same level as rulers and kings of this world. And further it seemed that the Church was demanding that the kings and rulers of this world acknowledge the Church’s sovereignty over them. I couldn’t reconcile this with the humble servant-leader image of Jesus in the Gospels -- who comes "to serve and not to be served."

But Jesus says emphatically in today’s gospel that he is not speaking of a kingdom similar to the current world kingdoms, “My kingdom is not of this world.”

Today’s readings reveal that the fulness of Jesus’ kingdom will be revealed only at the end of time. The Book of Daniel attests that at the end of time there will appear one like the Son of man and all peoples and nations will serve him, “His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, and his kingship shall not be destroyed."

And the Book of Revelation repeats this image of Jesus' coming at the end of time -- acknowledged by all peoples of the earth, “Behold, he is coming amid the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. . . . ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty.’”

And yet Jesus acknowledges that his kingdom is present even now, “You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Jesus longs for his voice to be heard. And the voice of Jesus does resound universally throughout the world inscribed forever in the inspired words of the New Testament and passed on throughout the ages by the proclamation of the Church.

But even more wonderfully, the "voice of Jesus" resounds personally within the hearts of believers. Through the sending of the Holy Spirit we become temples of the Spirit -- born again through water and the Spirit. Now the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd arises also in our own hearts, “Whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out (Jn 10:2-3).”

On this feast of Christ the King of the Universe — the final Sunday of the Liturgical Year -- we are invited to discern Christ’s presence throughout the universe and in our own hearts. It is truly right and just that we celebrate this feast from the depth of our being: “I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and that your joy might be complete (Jn 15:11).”

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