

FIRST READING – C CHRIST THE KING

A reading from the second book of Samuel.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said,
“Look, we are your bone and flesh.

For some time, while Saul was king over us,
it was you who led out Israel and brought it in.

The Lord said to you:

“It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel,
you who shall be ruler over Israel.”

So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron;
and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord,
and they anointed David king over Israel.

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – C CHRIST THE KING

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

Give thanks to the Father,
who has enabled you

to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

The Father has rescued us from the power of darkness
and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son,
in whom we have redemption,
the forgiveness of sins.

Christ is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation;

for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created,
things visible and invisible,

whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers –
all things have been created through him and for him.

Christ is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.

Christ is the head of the body, the Church;
he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
so that he might come to have first place in everything.

For in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things,
whether on earth or in heaven,
by making peace through the blood of his Cross.

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – C CHRIST THE KING

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

The leaders scoffed at Jesus, saying,

“He saved others.

let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, his chosen one!”

The soldiers also mocked Jesus, coming up and offering him sour wine,

and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”

There was also an inscription over him,

“This is the King of the Jews.”

One of the criminals who were hanged there

kept deriding him and saying,

“Are you not the Christ?

Save yourself and us!”

But the other rebuked him, saying,

“Do you not fear God,

since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?

And we indeed have been condemned justly,

for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds,

but this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said,

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus replied,

“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

It was a happy inspiration when Pope Pius XI made the last Sunday of October the feast of Christ the King. Although in some ways it duplicated certain themes of Ascension Day, it provided for a distinctive emphasis on Catholic social action, the counterpart of the social gospel in American Protestantism. It also provided liturgical support for the social teachings of the great papal encyclicals from Leo XIII on.

Now the time has come for a review of Pius XI's action. Feasts governed by the secular calendar, like the "last Sunday in October," lack sound precedent in liturgical history.

The feast of Christ the King, if it is to be observed at all ought to be integrated into the Church year. Moreover, there is a danger of isolating the kingship of Christ from its proper biblical context, which is eschatological.

His enthronement at the ascension is the opening act of his final eschatological reign, and his continued heavenly rule between the ascension and his return marks the progressive defeat of the powers of evil. For he must reign until he has subjected all his enemies under his feet.

These needs were met by another happy inspiration, namely, the transference of the feast to the last Sunday of the Church year. This Sunday has always had a strong eschatological tone, even with the traditional readings. Johann Sebastian Bach composed a setting of *Wachet Auf* ("Sleepers, Awake") for this Sunday, which in German Lutheranism is known as *Ewigkeitssonntag* (Eternity Sunday).

Reading I: 2 Samuel 5:1-3

David was always regarded as the ideal king, and when the messianic hope developed, it was natural that the Messiah should be thought of as a Son of David. He would be not only a descendant of David but also the type of king that David was.

There are two attitudes toward kingship in the Old Testament. One, representing the royal ideology of the Davidic court, pictures the king as the sacramental expression of YHWH's kingship.

This passage from 2 Samuel is an expression of this line of thinking. It stresses the humane sides of kingship—the solidarity of the king with his people ("We are your bone and flesh") and the king as shepherd.

These traits were taken up on a higher level in the Christology and ecclesiology of the New Testament. Christ is one with his body the Church, and he is the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep. He knows his sheep by name.

But there is another attitude toward kingship in the Old Testament. All human kingship risks a denial of the ultimate sovereignty of YHWH, who alone is king. This other ideology is conscious that kingship can easily degenerate into tyranny. 1 Sam 8 is the classical formulation of this view.

The first attitude is expressed in the English coronation service, the second in the American Constitution, with its elaborate system of checks and balances. The dialectical tension between these two views is maintained in the New Testament.

In Rom 13 the state is the minister of God (the Greek word is *leitourgos*, a liturgical functionary: the English monarch is vested at his/her coronation in quasi-priestly vestments), whereas in Rev 13 the state is the beast from the abyss.

This dialectic must be maintained in any doctrine of the state, and not even the American Constitution should be interpreted undialectically! Liturgical minister and great beast—all states can be either of these, and even both at the same time.

Responsorial Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5

The pilgrims sang this psalm as they went up to Jerusalem for the festivals. The first part expresses the pilgrims' excitement as they arrive within the sacred precincts. They rejoice in the unity that Jerusalem symbolizes as the crowds, representing all the tribes, flow together to the temple of YHWH.

In some strands of post-exilic Judaism, it became part of the eschatological hope to envisage a day when the nations would flow together to Jerusalem (see Is 25:6). The New Testament sees this hope partially fulfilled in the admission of the Gentiles into the Church, and completely realized in the final coming of Christ.

See especially Rom 9-11, where Paul develops the thought that in bringing the collection from the Gentile churches to Jerusalem he is symbolizing the partial fulfillment of this hope, and propounds the conviction that his mission will contribute decisively to the final fulfillment, when the fullness of the Gentiles will be gathered in and all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:25-26).

Reading II: Colossians 1:12-20

Verses 15-20 form one of the great Christological hymns of the New Testament, comparable to Phil 2:6-11 and Jn 1:1-14. Some scholars regard it as a baptismal hymn.

Verses 12-15, which precede it, certainly fit a baptismal context very well when they speak of "our" (that is, the Christian community's) being qualified to participate in the inheritance of the saints, and of our translation from darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God, for that is precisely what happens in baptism.

But the hymn itself is purely Christological and has a cosmic sweep. It speaks about two different works of the Son of God. His first work in his preexistent state is his agency in

creation and preservation. It describes this preexistent state and work in terms derived from the wisdom concept as it had been developed especially in Hellenistic Judaism.

In the second part of the hymn (from verse 18), it speaks about his redeeming work. This work is not stated in chronological order, but it does refer to the incarnation (“in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”), to the cross [Note: This is probably a Pauline or Paulinist addition to the hymn] and its cosmic, reconciling effects, to his resurrection as the first-born from the dead, and to his establishment of the Church as his body.

It was a bold step when the Greek-speaking Christians identified Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnation of the heavenly wisdom and claimed for him all the theology of wisdom that had been worked out in Hellenistic Judaism.

It seems at first sight a far cry from his simple message of the inbreaking of God’s kingdom. Yet Jesus himself had claimed to be the mouthpiece of the divine wisdom (for example, Lk 11:49).

It was a natural development of this that the Greek-speaking Christians identified him as the incarnation of the personified wisdom of later Jewish tradition.

This enabled them to oppose the gnosticizers who denied the salvability of creation and interpreted redemption to mean redemption from creation, by asserting that the redemption effected by Christ was the redemption of creation.

If the wisdom of God means God going forth out of being in himself in creative and redemptive activity, then this early Christian hymn proclaims that it is the same God who creates and redeems.

What has all this to do with the kingship of Christ? The preface of the hymn gives the answer.

It is precisely the acts of God in Christ celebrated in the hymn that have transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

The kingship of Christ means that the eternal Son of God who became incarnate in Jesus is the “cosmocrator”—the ruler of the universe.

The Church, his body, is the sphere in which that kingship, though still hidden, is acknowledged and proclaimed.

The world is the universe over which Christ’s kingship is destined to prevail.

Gospel: Luke 23:35-43

It must be admitted that the story of the penitent thief comes as an anticlimax after the tremendous cosmic sweep of the hymn from Colossians. The kingship of Christ is certainly one of the themes of this Gospel.

First there is the taunt of the crowds and the inscription on the cross—the one ironical, the other intended as a false charge but true for the eyes of faith.

Then there is the penitent thief's request that Jesus remember him when he comes to his kingly power, and the assurance that the thief would today be with him in paradise.

The first two texts domesticate the idea of kingdom. Jesus is the king of the Jews, not of the cosmos. The third text individualizes it, and, one is almost tempted to say in the context of this Sunday, trivializes it.

Of course, Christ's kingdom has its domestic and individualistic aspects. It is the kingdom of the Jews, of the religious, of the Church, as well as of the universe. And he is the king of the believer who is brought to penitence by the contemplation of the cross.

Reginald H. Fuller