

## Christ the King (2015)

(Dan 7:13-14; Rev 1:5-8; John 18:33b-37)

So often we think of this great solemnity, Christ the Universal King, as an end--the end of liturgical year, and as the culmination of all that has come before, starting with Advent and Christmas, when Jesus first appeared in the world. We think of His public ministry in which He laid the foundation for the coming Kingdom of God and the formation of His disciples. We think of the opposition of the Jewish leaders which led to His passion and death. And finally His triumphant resurrection and ascension, the sending forth of the Holy Spirit to constitute the Church. And that is where we are now--the culmination of all that, singing, "Crown Him with Many Crowns."

That brings us to where we are now. But rather than being a conclusion to what had gone before, it should rather be a beginning, a beginning of where we go from here. Jesus did not come simply to be crowned king of the universe; He came to establish the kingdom of God. When He said, "The Kingdom of God is at hand," we must understand **that** "at hand" in terms of God's eternity, according to which one day is a thousand years and a thousand years a day.

What does the Bible tell us the final stage will be? There are passages that suggest a fiery conflagration, and there are not lacking people who long for that kind of an ending; any other would disappoint them. Self-satisfied,

they are sure they will escape it. Like the ones whose cars bear the bumper stickers: “In case of rapture, this vehicle will be unmanned.” They may be surprised.

But there are other visions of the end. The one I like, from the prophet Isaiah, goes like this:

“In days to come,  
The mountain of the Lord’s house  
shall be established as the highest mountain  
and raised above the hills.  
All nations shall stream toward it.  
Many peoples shall come and say:  
”Come, let us go up to the Lord’s mountain,  
to the house of the God of Jacob,  
That he may instruct us in his ways,  
and we may walk in his paths.”  
For from Zion will go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between the nations,  
and set terms for many peoples.  
They shall beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
One nation shall not raise the sword against another,  
nor shall they train for war again.”

Obviously this is not the world in which we live. All we need mention are the words ISIS, Taliban, Syria. In the Holy Land of the Chosen People we see conflict between the Israeli and the Palestinians. Is this the Kingdom of God that Jesus came to proclaim and establish? Would He be

happy to return and claim this as His kingdom? I think not. What is the answer? I think the answer is that the Kingdom of God is a work in progress. Like the little kid who says, “Be patient: God hasn’t finished with me yet.” Is this a realistic answer? Don’t underestimate God’s patience. I think we can take evolution as an analogy. God could have created our universe in an instant, but instead He chose the way of self-development that we call “evolution,” a process that took billions of years. The fossil record demonstrates that in this process there were many false starts that led nowhere, requiring many new beginnings, but the universe is now a thing of beauty, the human body, the human brain, for example, a marvel of complexity, of efficiency. Why should history, even salvation history be any different?

Is it realistic to expect any real progress toward what the world **should** be? If we believe in God’s power, His love, His mercy, the answer is “yes.” Let’s take an example from the Old Testament. Israel then was a mere postage stamp on the face of the earth, a tiny country surrounded by mighty empires—the Babylonian, the Assyrian, Egyptian, followed by the Greek and Roman, each with their own pantheon and magnificent temples, yet Israel dared proclaim their God was Lord of all and proclaimed it dozens of times in their psalms “Praise the LORD, all you nations! Glorify him, all you peoples!” “All kings of the earth will praise you, LORD” “Let all the earth fear the LORD” and countless variations. Astounding! And yet there is now no continent, no nation, no people that does not contain worshipers of the God of Israel. This is real

progress, humanly inexplicable.

This is the sort of thing projected in the parable of the leaven. A little pinch of yeast can leaven a whole batch of dough, yet it works so quietly, slowly, imperceptibly until we suddenly realize what has been accomplished.

Surprisingly, modern technology comes to our aid: now we can say, in a real sense, the whole earth is one. Somewhere a plane goes down, there's an earthquake, a flood, and within minutes the whole world knows about it. Not only disasters; it extends also to negotiations, proclamations of leaders, progress toward peace. We are all one in hopes, all one in fears. There may be Muslim extremists, but there are also Muslim leaders to tell the world that **that** is not the teaching of the Koran.

The League of Nations was one beginning that came to nothing. We now have the United Nations, the European Union, the ecumenical movement. They may all come to nothing, but the movement is toward unity, understanding, peaceful solutions. God is very patient. It took the universe billions of years to evolve whereas humankind has been around for perhaps a million years. And while God allowed evolution to follow its own course, according to the best thinkers, we now have a Universal King who is neither indifferent nor powerless with reference to our world's progress. There is also hope in the way our new Pope, Pope Francis, is determined to lead us, the way of the gospel, wanting a Church concerned for the poor, for peace, for mercy, and for dialogue.

We should not think that the end of all this is pre-

determined. We needn't, shouldn't believe it is the will of Our Lord, the God of all mercy, that all should end up in a fiery Armageddon. It **could** end up that way, but in a certain, very real sense, it is up to us. There is a prayer to Christ, King of the Universe that is worth praying every day: "Lord Jesus, I acknowledge Thee King of the Universe; all that has been created has been made for Thee. Exercise upon me all Thy rights. Lord Jesus, I offer Thee my poor actions that all may acknowledge Thy sacred kingship so that thus Thy peace may be established throughout the universe." Let us put that prayer into action. What actions do we offer Him? Do we choose leaders whose policies lead to peace or war? Do we, individually, choose belligerence or reconciliation? Do we exercise mercy? Mercy is sort of like leaven: it spreads itself around, can permeate the world. Our actions may be "poor," but, added to the power of our Almighty King, they are irresistible.

There are those who positively anticipate with longing a fiery ending (for others, that is) and we can sympathize with their disappointment, just as we can sympathize with those sitting on their roofs waiting for the Rapture. We can console them by reminding them that "no one ever said that life is fair." **We**, however, can look forward to the end foretold by Isaiah, when "one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again," to which the prophet added, "House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." We have a King who ardently desires peace and we should pray that

He will lead us in the ways of peace, the way the Kingdom of God **must** end up.