

CHRIST THE KING

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QUARTER OF A CENTURY has passed since the late Pope Pius XI, of happy memory, established the Feast of Christ the King, and proclaimed the sovereign rights of Jesus Christ over all mankind. In his Encyclical Letter, *Quas Primas*, issued on Dec. 11, 1925, the Holy Father carefully and beautifully unfolded the historical, dogmatic, devotional, and liturgical aspects of the Kingship of Christ. The Peace of Christ in the Reign of Christ, motto and hallmark of Pius XI's pontificate, was again offered to the peoples of the world. As the years passed, men chose to ignore the loving pleas and salutary warnings of Christ's Vicar, and set up for themselves other gods to worship, other masters to serve. The bitter fruits of this insane blindness and hardness of heart were reaped in the dreadful carnage which engulfed the world in 1939, the same year in which Pius XI went to his eternal reward.

Our present Holy Father has proclaimed another Holy Year of Jubilee, and with the voice of chief Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, calls all men to acknowledge and return to the royal household over which Christ is King. Once again the horrible storm clouds gather, there are terrifying rumors of wars, and in some places the combat has actually been joined and fresh young blood spilt. Is war, then, king? Is the hour of Satan come upon us, and are we abandoned to his insatiable thirst for hatred and destruction? No, Christ is still King, and He shall be King forever, for of His Kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:33).

THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST AFFIRMED

We give Our Lord Jesus Christ the title of King, first in a metaphorical sense, because of the high degree of perfection whereby He excels all creatures. Our Lord truly reigns over the minds, wills, and hearts of men. From Him we receive the truths whereby we are saved, for, as St. Paul says, every mind must be conformed to the Mind of Jesus. By His grace and inspiration He moves our free wills and subjects them to the sweet and reasonable yoke of virtue. Above all, Christ is King of our hearts, for it never has nor ever will be

known that any man is loved so ardently and so universally as Jesus Christ.

With a much deeper and more profound insight, we recognize also that the title and power of King belong to Christ, *as man*, in the strict and most proper sense. Because He is the Word of God, consubstantial with the Father, Our Lord has by Divine right supreme and absolute dominion over all things created. But as man also, He has received from the Father "power and glory and a kingdom" (Dan. 7:13-14), as all the Prophets repeatedly foretold. Jesus Himself laid claim to this royal authority on many occasions during His public life. When about to ascend to His Father, to claim the eternal glory prepared for Him, Christ reiterated and confirmed this Kingship: "All power is given to Me in Heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:17). Thus St. John acclaims Christ as the "Ruler of the kings of the earth" (Apoc. 1:5), Who "has on His garment and on His thigh a name written: 'King of kings and Lord of lords'" (Apoc. 19:16). St. Paul affirms that Christ must reign until, at the end of the world, He has put all His enemies under the feet of God the Father. (Cf. I Cor. 15:25).

If Christ has stated that He is King, and if the Scriptures testify to this claim again and again, how can men ignore or deny it? The answer is, without faith, without humility or religion or the other infused virtues, how can men do anything but ignore or deny the Kingship of Christ? Faith is indeed the free gift of God; but God does not refuse the request of a sincere and upright heart.

HOW CHRIST IS KING

Christ is King both by natural and by acquired right. Christ's natural right to Kingship is founded upon the ineffable Hypostatic Union, the mysterious union of Divine and human nature in one Person. Further, Christ is King by acquired right, for He is our Redeemer. We are no longer our own property, for Christ has bought us "at a great price" (I Cor. 6:20).

The Kingdom of Christ is spiritual and is concerned primarily and chiefly with spiritual things. Before the Roman magistrate, Our Saviour declared that His Kingdom was "not of this world" (John 17:36). The Gospels present this Kingdom as one which must be entered by penance and faith, unto interior regeneration. However, as the Pope points out, in *Quas Primas*, "It would be a grave error to suppose that Christ has no authority whatever in civil affairs, since by virtue of the absolute empire over all creatures committed to Him by the Father, all things are in His power."

Finally, the empire of our Redeemer embraces all men. All are subject to Him, whether knowingly and willingly or not. As Pope Leo XIII proclaimed: "His empire includes not only Catholic nations, not only baptized persons who, though of right belonging to the Church, have been led astray by error, or have been cut off from her by schism, but also those who are outside the Christian faith; so that truly the whole of mankind is subject to Jesus Christ."¹ All men, collectively and individually, the state, the family, each single person, are under Christ's dominion; for in Him is the salvation both of the individual and of society: "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under Heaven given to men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

PEACE: THE BLESSING OF CHRIST'S KINGSHIP

The great Pontiff who instituted the Feast of Christ the King outlined as the program and goal of his pontificate, "The Peace of Christ in the Reign of Christ." Thus his first Encyclical, popularly known as *Ubi Arcano*,² bears this motto as its title.

Christ is the King of Peace; His reign is the Reign of Peace, that peace which the world does not know because it is spiritual; it is the effect and reward of love. For Christ is not a tyrant or a dictator; He is the King of Love. While the nations search frantically for peace—a peace without Christ—no peace is to be found. The fires of charity have grown cold in the world, and without charity there can be no peace. Christ reigns through love, and this is at once the sublime secret and the glorious message of His Kingship.

Should we not rather say that the Kingship of Christ is based on justice? Surely reverence and submission are due to Our Divine Lord in strictest justice, precisely as He is King by natural and absolute right. This cannot be denied. Yet Jesus Himself proclaims His sovereign power and solicits our obedience under the title of love: "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34), and again: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

So too, peace follows upon the universal reign of love of Jesus Christ over the minds and wills and hearts of men. In his Encyclical on the Peace of Christ in the Reign of Christ, the Pope, citing St.

¹ *Annum Sacrum*, Encyclical Letter of Leo XIII.

² Dec. 23, 1922. The papal encyclicals are generally referred to by their opening words, although their official title is taken from the subject-matter with which they are concerned.

Thomas Aquinas, notes that "true and authentic peace emanates from charity rather than from justice, since justice merely removes the obstacles to peace, such as wrongs and injuries, whereas peace is peculiarly and properly an act of charity."³

Justice, therefore, must be tempered with mercy, with fraternal charity, that in the Kingdom of Christ, above all, that peace may reign for which all good men yearn.

PEACE IN OUR TIME

Will justice and mercy abound in this world of ours—between individuals, among nations, and in the councils the nations have set up? The answer to this question is also the answer to one which rises so eagerly today in the hearts of all of us: Will there be peace? Our Holy Mother the Church, through the voice of her chief Pastor, has given us the only answer. When men recognize, both in private and in public life, that Christ is King over all, both individuals and society will at last—and then only—know and enjoy the great, God-given blessing of peace. The peace which Christ has promised cannot be taken away, just as it cannot be bestowed, by any created power. True liberty, well-ordered discipline, and the harmony of a virtuous life are the blessings which accompany this peace of Christ.

Twenty-five years ago Pius XI did not despair of seeing this peace which the King of Peace came to bring on earth. The Holy Father hoped and prayed that the blindness and hard-heartedness of men would give way to the light of faith and melt before the warmth of true charity. This did not happen. Well might the words of Christ, spoken as He wept over foredoomed Jerusalem, be repeated over the modern materialistic and godless world that has rejected its King: "If thou hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are for thy peace!"

"We firmly hope that the feast of the Kingship of Christ, which in the future will be yearly observed, may hasten the return of society to our loving Saviour" (*Quas Primas*). Christ the King has not failed His people. The mercy and goodness of God are as available now as always. Yet one thing is clear to all: even after the disaster of the recent war, neither individuals, nor society, nor peoples have attained to true peace. It is man who has failed; he has failed to acknowledge the Kingship of Christ. At the root of class warfare, international strife, and domestic discord, are the terrible spiritual maladies which are the worst scourge of the present day.

³ *Ubi Arcano*. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 29, a. 3 ad 3.

Still there is hope for peace in our time. That hope lies in the Reign of Christ, the King of Peace. "He must reign in our minds, which should assent with perfect submission and firm belief to revealed truths and to the doctrine of Christ. He must reign in our wills, which should obey the laws and precepts of God. He must reign in our hearts, which should spurn natural desires and love God above all things and cleave to Him alone. He must reign in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls" (*Quas Primas*).

In a few months the Holy Year of Jubilee of 1950 will be over. The Holy Door will once again be closed, but not, let us pray, the door of man's heart to the gracious love of God: "Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates: and the King of glory shall enter in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory" (Ps. 23: 9-10). The Lord of Peace and of Love, He is Christ the King.