

## Christ the King – B

It is said that at dinner parties the two subjects that should be avoided at all costs are religion and politics. At Mass, we are of course not exactly at a dinner party, and so religion is fair game. And that's essentially what I talk about at every Mass. But politics is another story. I am quite grateful that I am not permitted to promote political candidates publicly, for several reasons: 1) it would instantly alienate many people in the congregation and then they wouldn't listen to anything else I have to say. 2) None of the candidates are perfect. 3) I think we live in a society that is oversaturated with politics and it's good to have a place to get away from it, at least for a little while. 4) My allegiance as a priest is not to any candidate to political office, but rather to Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, whose feast as Christ, the King of the Universe, we celebrate today. Thankfully, I was not ordained to promote political candidates but rather to preach Jesus Christ.

That is not to say, however, that I cannot talk about issues that have become political. I think there is a false assumption out there that priests cannot preach about anything that has become a political issue, which is not true – not according to our constitution, and not according to the Church. And that is a good thing, because I believe that, as our society becomes less and less religious, something moves in to fill the void that is left behind, and in our country I think that is politics. It seems that virtually everything has become – or has the potential to become – a political issue. And when it does, it is not right to say that this or that subject then becomes off-limits in preaching. People may object to the content of the preaching, but it is not right to say that we have no right to preach about issues that have become political, for example, issues regarding human life or the dignity of the human person.

However, I do not intend this homily to deal so much with political issues, other than to acknowledge that we recently went

through our every-four-year democratic process of electing a president, along with candidates to many other political offices. I have to say I'm grateful that the election is over and that the political ads have ceased.

And as I think we're all aware, there has been either jubilation or sorrow at the outcome of the election. For some, it's the dawn of an exciting new era. For others, it is the beginning of a national calamity. For many, it's a big question mark. I am not here to say which of these options you should believe it to be. But regardless of whatever era is beginning in our nation, this one too will eventually come to an end. Every political leader, no matter how powerful, no matter entrenched, no matter how corrupt or beloved or whatever, is a mere mortal. And earthly power is only temporary.

A study of world history will remind us that no politician, no nation, no empire, no political entity lasts forever. There have been numerous examples of empires once considered omnipotent that

eventually collapsed and were consigned to the pages of history books. Here's one example: the Roman Empire, which lasted for many hundreds of years. If one lived at some point in the middle of these hundreds of years that it lasted, it would probably have seemed that it would go on forever. Perhaps Pontius Pilate, who makes an appearance in our Gospel reading today, felt secure in the belief that the Romans would always prevail over their enemies.

When he saw Jesus standing before him – who had been arrested and no doubt would have looked completely powerless to Pilate – he probably could not have imagined that Jesus had any power whatsoever. No doubt he thought Jesus was more of a curiosity than anything else. “Are you the king of the Jews?”, he asked him. And then shortly after that, “So you are a king then?” Pilate could only conceive of a king in the earthly, political sense. Jesus in that moment probably did not even look like an earthly king. And in any case, Pilate knew that he had power over Jesus in that moment, and

he handed Jesus over to be scourged and then assented to him being put to death.

But just a few years later, Pilate was removed from his position as the governor of the Roman province of Judea and had to return to Rome, replaced by someone else. Nothing more is known about him, including how he died. And the Roman Empire itself entered into a period of decline that lasted several centuries before it finally collapsed for good in 476 A.D. The once seemingly invincible Roman Empire has vanished into the pages of history as have so many other empires that came before and after it.

And every political movement and nation and leader will likewise vanish. Because all earthly power again is only temporary. The One - and the only One - who will ultimately triumph is Jesus Christ, the true King of the Universe. Jesus - who seemed to have been defeated like so many others before him when he died on the Cross. His little flock of followers scattered when he was arrested;

only three of them remained at the Cross, one of them being his mother. But we believe that Jesus rose from the dead three days later and in so doing triumphed over death. And the Church that he established here on earth not only survived but has grown and spread throughout the world, despite persecution, despite the sinfulness and weakness of her members, despite tremendous divisions, despite calamity after calamity.

However, it may not seem that Jesus Christ is truly sovereign. Certainly in this world that we live in, He is not. Even during the age of Christendom hundreds of years ago, when the Church was at the height of her political power, and Christianity strongly influenced virtually every aspect of society and culture, one can't exactly say that Jesus Christ was truly sovereign, because there were still wars and corruption and violence and so on. Jesus Christ is not sovereign in this world, at least not in the subjective sense. That's because God gave us free will: He does not force us to follow Him. He doesn't

force us to accept Jesus as our Savior, our Redeemer, and our King. He doesn't force us to follow his commandments. And so we must live with the consequences of our choices. But in the objective sense, Jesus Christ is sovereign: He is Lord of heaven and earth, of all that is, that was, and that will be. At the end of time, Jesus Christ will return, and then his sovereignty over all things will at last be revealed to all. He will triumph once and for all over the powers of evil and sin and death. And He will reign forever and ever.

Jesus says in our Gospel reading today that his kingdom does not belong to this world. In other words, his kingdom is not of this world. But it is still in the world. God is still at work in the world, in the hearts of his countless disciples, and in ways that remain mysterious and hidden to us. His kingdom may seem very feeble in this world at times, perhaps even on the point of being vanquished, but it is still present and will remain present in this world until the end of time.

However, the big question for us is this: is Jesus Christ sovereign in *our* hearts? Is he sovereign in our lives? Do we put the Lord first in our lives? Do we actively and daily seek to do his will, to follow his commandments, to give him time for prayer every day? Do we regularly receive the gifts of the sacraments that he has given to his Church? When faced with a big decision in life, do we bring it to prayer and seek to know God's will? If you are here today, I would guess that Jesus is a part of your life to at least some degree. But does he take the first place in your heart? There are many other things that vie for our attention: some noble, some not so noble. Some good, some bad. I would venture to say that each one of us – myself included – has more work to do to make Jesus truly sovereign in our hearts. That's because none of us are perfect. We all fall short from time to time, or maybe even a lot. Making Jesus our Sovereign Lord and King is the work of a lifetime; it's something we must recommit ourselves to every single day. It requires nothing less than

a daily invitation to the Lord to take up residence in our hearts, to make of them an ever more fitting place for the Lord to dwell.

As we come to the end of one liturgical year this week and begin a new one next Sunday, let's make a liturgical New Year's resolution to invite Jesus into our hearts every day, to crown him our sovereign King and Lord.

- **November 24, 2024 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**