

## Christ the King

(The Sunday next before Advent)

*(Sunday between 20 and 26 November inclusive)*

### Principal Service readings

Daniel 7.9-10,13,14	Daniel's dream of the venerable one and the son of man
Psalm 93	The God of justice
Revelation 1.4b-8	John's vision of Jesus Christ coming on the clouds
John 18.33-37	'My kingdom is not of this world', Jesus tells Pilate

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *Jesus is questioned by Pilate*

<sup>33</sup>Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' <sup>35</sup>Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' <sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' <sup>37</sup>Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that 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.'

John 18.33-37 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

## Comments and Questions

Year B of the three-year lectionary uses Mark's gospel extensively. However, for this final Sunday of Year B the gospel reading is taken from John, being drawn from the passion narrative.

Jesus has already been interviewed by Caiaphas, but John gives more detail on the questioning by Pilate. Why might this be?

Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all refer to the kingdom of God, but John does not do so; he is more interested in the royalty of Jesus.

Pilate tries to discover the nature of Jesus' subversive actions and cleverly asks him if he is the King of the Jews (v.33), for such a claim would be subversive of Caesar's power, and punishable by death. If Jesus answers 'yes', then it is an open and shut case; if he answers 'no' then Pilate might be able to dismiss the case as not being of a political nature. Pilate must have been wondering why a 'religious' issue has been brought before him. Do you think Pilate minds whether Jesus answers 'yes' or 'no'?

Jesus does not help Pilate, but asks questions of his own (v.34). perhaps trying to make Pilate consider whether he is asking his own question, or being manipulated. Pilate is not to be put off and repeats his question in another form: 'What have you done?' (v.35), to which Jesus gives a longer answer.

The dialogue offers the opportunity for John to bring out the nature of the reign of Jesus Christ. Jesus says his kingdom does not come from this world; there is no army to defend him (v.36). What does it mean to be king in the way Jesus speaks of it? Jesus claims his mission is to testify to the truth and that he has the allegiance of all who belong to truth (v.37). What does this mean?

The group of words in Greek based on *aletheia* (truth/true/truly) occur fifty-five times in John's gospel.

### ***Liturgical Context***

The Feast of Christ the King is an 'idea' feast, celebrating the encompassing authority of Christ which shall lead the whole world into the everlasting kingdom of peace and justice. It was instituted by Pius XI in the encyclical *Quas primas* of 11 December 1925, at the end of the Jubilee Year, the last Sunday in October being allotted to it, the Sunday

before All Saints', thus associating the feast with the hope of saints and martyrs down the ages. From 1970 it has been moved to the last Sunday of the church year, placing it as the focus and climax of a season of remembering and looking forward. In Church of England usage it was included as an alternative in *The Promise of his Glory* (1991), and is in the Common Worship calendar (1997).

## Quotations

### 1

Christ has dominion over all creatures, a dominion not seized by violence nor usurped, but his by essence and by nature.

Cyril of Alexandria, d.444

### 2

If to Christ our Lord is given all power in heaven and on earth; if all men, purchased by his precious blood, are by a new right subjected to his dominion; if this power embraces all men, it must be clear that not one of our faculties is exempt from his empire. He must reign in our minds, which should assent with perfect submission and firm belief to revealed truths and to the doctrines 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, or to use the words of the Apostle Paul, as instruments of justice unto God.

*Quas primas* (On the Feast of Christ the King) / Pope Pius XI, encyclical promulgated on 11 December 1925, sec. 33

### 3

Jesus was born twice. The birth at Bethlehem was a birth into a life of weakness. The second time he was born from the grave – 'the first-born from the dead' – into the glory of heaven and the throne of God.

Andrew Murray, 1828–1917

**4**

Wherever God rules over the human heart as King, there is the Kingdom of God established,

Paul W. Harrison, 1883–1962

**5**

Some years ago, an American soldier on a bus in Sweden told the man sitting next to him, ‘America is the most democratic country in the world. Ordinary citizens may go to the White House to see the President and discuss things with him.’

The man said, ‘That’s nothing. In Sweden, the King and the people travel on the same bus.’

When the man got off the bus, the American was told by other passengers that he had been sitting next to King Gustav Adolf VI.

anonymous

**Related topics**

*For further study:*

Christology; apocalyptic Literature; Advent; God’s reign; day of judgement; kingdom

**Closing Prayer**

Almighty and eternal God,  
to Jesus Christ, the first-born from the dead,  
you have granted everlasting dominion  
and a kingship that shall not pass away.

Remove from us every desire for privilege and power,  
that we may imitate the sacrificial love of Christ our King  
and, as a royal and priestly people,  
serve you humbly in our brothers and sisters.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.

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<sup>2</sup> *Opening Prayers : Scripture-related Collects for years A, B and C from The Sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 1997.*