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A homily for the 34th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Christ the King)

Date: Sunday, November 20, 2016 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: 2 Samuel 5:1–3

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 122:1–5 | **Response:** Psalm 122:1

Second Reading: Colossians 1:12–20

Gospel Acclamation: Mark 11:9–10

Gospel Reading: Luke 23:35–43

Preached at: the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Some people believe the Feast of Christ the King is a feast dating back from the Middle Ages, when Monarchy was more common. It was in fact instituted in the last century and represents the concerns of our recent history. In 1925 Pope Pius XI understood that the old royal kingdoms of the world were crumbling, and in their stead “–ism’s” of the day – socialism, Nazism, and communism – were becoming clear and present dangers.

The pope wanted to challenge these new emerging allegiances. He wanted to remind people that ultimate loyalty was due to the true authority in heaven. And so he proclaimed the feast of the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King.

If one reads the Psalms, it does not take long to hear the Psalmist affirm that God alone is the King of Israel, the King of Glory; God alone was to be feared, loved, and above all else was to be obeyed over anyone else. Israel was always warned of the grave sin of idolatry, which was basically forgetting the primacy of God. But just like some people today, the people of Israel went “gaga” when they heard of the kings and queens of other nations. They decided that they, too,

wanted a king of flesh and blood like other nations. They got their wish with their first king, Saul, but the prophet Samuel warned the people that there would be hell to pay because they would always be tempted to obey their king rather than the King of glory.

Today's First Reading is about Saul's successor, King David. He was young and handsome and daring. He captured Jerusalem as the royal city. He who once shepherded sheep now shepherded—that is, protected—the people of Israel. David was not a king with a stiff upper lip. He was wild and crazy enough to strip down to his boxers and dance before the Ark of the Covenant. The people loved him.

But Solomon was right. Kings and queens can be dangerous. David was a marvelous king who restored God's people. But he had feet of clay like the rest of us. He was vain, deceitful, crooked, and lustful. King David drank too much and had affairs with married women. If he lived today, he would rival the antics of the British or Swazi royal families and, no doubt, appear on the cover of People magazine or its equivalent.

One thousand years later, when Jesus, the one who called himself the Good Shepherd, rode into Jerusalem on a mule, they greeted him as royalty by waving palms and crying out hosannas and called him the Son of David. They did so, not because Jesus reminded them of King David's sins, but because Jesus reminded them of King David's covenant with the people. Like David, Jesus was a shepherd king until the end.

That is what today's Gospel from Luke tells us about Christ the King. He is the king who, even in the midst of humiliation, mockery, abandonment, and the grisly dying of crucifixion with criminals, He still holds on to God's will.

Throughout his life Jesus resists every temptation to play up to the crowds, to curry political favor, or to go with the 'in' crowd. Instead, he embraces God's will and remembers his covenant to be shepherd even to those who reject him, and especially to the sinner who is not only close to his cross but close to his kingdom.

In the history of the bloody twentieth century we saw from time to time the practical relevancy of proclaiming Christ as our King. In the mist of the madness of Hitler's holocaust, some German bishops declared that Christ alone is our king. When the Soviet Union was trying to hold on to its domination of Eastern Europe, the shipyard workers in Gdansk grew in solidarity because they believed that Christ alone is our king. And in the midst of our own sinfulness of apartheid, many religious leaders in South Africa proclaimed that Christ alone is our king.

We surrender our souls whenever we fail to speak to our rulers, whether members of parliament or ward councilors, parents or teachers, bosses or bishops or pastors. We surrender our souls whenever we remain silent when those who rule over us forget they are not God. We surrender our souls whenever we give in to the "-ism's" of today – whether they are consumerism, hedonism, narcissism...

Whether we declare it boldly and explicitly or whether we simply silently refuse to let others strip us and our world of our humanity, it is a great inheritance that Christ the King has left us: the power to bow to no person, no possession, no addiction, no demon.

For Christ alone is our king!

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