

Solemnity of Christ the King - C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

Introduction

Instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1926, this feast was celebrated on the last Sunday of October to foster the awareness of Christ's dominion over all people and to establish peace among nations. After Vatican Council II, the feast was transferred to the last Sunday of the Liturgical Year, the Sunday before Advent, on which the human race is consecrated to the Sacred Heart through the Litany of the Sacred Heart and a prayer recited before the Blessed Sacrament.

This feast celebrates Christ's Kingship in an altogether non-worldly way. Jesus was anointed by the Father with the oil of gladness as the Eternal Priest and Universal King. As Priest He offered His life on the altar of the Cross and redeemed the human race by this one perfect sacrifice of peace. As King He claims dominion over all creation that He may present to the almighty Father a Kingdom of truth and life, a Kingdom of holiness and grace, a Kingdom of justice, love, and peace.

1st Reading - 2 Samuel 5:1-3 (this same reading can also be found in 1 Chronicles 11:1-5)

The main purpose of 1 and 2 Samuel is to provide a history of the foundation of the kingdom of Israel and the settlement of the throne on David and his line. In the chronology of events, those portrayed in the book of Judges immediately precede those recounted in the books of Samuel. At the end of Judges, the people saw a monarchy as the only way out of a situation of internal strife and anarchy. Outside enemies had been reduced to one, the Philistines, who were established along the Mediterranean coast; but the Philistines were so formidable and expansionist that the very survival of Israel seemed to be at stake and the tribes really needed to combine forces.

Samuel, who is regarded as the last of the judges, was the man chosen to bring about this unification. God used him to make Saul the first king of Israel. Everything connected with this choice of Saul, as with later events resulting from it, shows that God is still with His people; He is going to bring them to new political and military heights. The Philistines (descended from Egypt, son of Ham, son of Noah) are defeated, though not brought under total control. Like the Ammonites (descended from Ammon who was the result of the incestuous union of Lot and his younger daughter), Moabites (descended from Moab who was the result of the incestuous union of Lot and his older daughter), Edomites [(red) descended from Esau], and Aramites (descended from Shem), they become tributaries of Israel. This whole campaign was brought to a conclusion during the reign of David, whose vassal even the king of Tyre became.

The effect of all this is that all Transjordan came to be dominated by David.

Our reading today is of the anointing of David as king of Israel. David was 30 years old and reigned for 40 years.

5:1 All the tribes of Israel came to David

David had been anointed king of Judah seven years earlier (2 Samuel 2:4).

in Hebron

A city in the hill country of Judah, about 20 miles south of Jerusalem.

and said: “Here we are, your bone and your flesh. ² In days past, when Saul was our king, it was you who led the Israelites out and brought them back. And the LORD said to you, ‘You shall shepherd my people Israel and shall be commander of Israel.’” ³ When all the elders of Israel came to David in Hebron, King David made an agreement with them there before the LORD,

They made a covenant – a sacred promise, accompanied by an oath, which binds them together as a family.

and they anointed him

The use of oil as a refreshing ointment was extremely common in the ancient world. The origin and precise symbolism of anointing as a sacred rite cannot be traced in Israel. It is clear that the purpose of anointing a person or thing was to make it sacred. It was done to priests, the tent of meeting, the ark, the furniture of the tent, and to kings. Saul, David, and Jehu were anointed by a prophet; Solomon was anointed by a priest; probably either sacred person could perform the ceremony.

king of Israel.

The two kingdoms did not thereupon coalesce, but remained distinct entities: David ruled over a 2-fold kingdom that eventually drew apart (in 722 B.C., upon the death of Solomon).

2nd Reading - Colossians 1:12-20

In Paul’s time Colossae was a small city in Asia Minor, situated in a region called Phrygia, in a valley of the Lycus River. Located in the same valley were Laodicea, about nine miles to the northeast; and Hierapolis, twelve miles to the North. This whole area is part of modern day Turkey. All that remains of Colossae today are some unimportant ruins.

Most of the inhabitants of the city, and in fact the whole region, were Gentiles, although Josephus tells us that Antiochus III “The Great” (223-187 B.C.) decided to transport 2000 Jewish families from Babylonia to Lydia and Phrygia. Acts 2:10 tells us that residents of Phrygia were among the Jews who heard Peter’s address in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

Paul himself was not the founder of the Christian community of Colossae. Epaphras, a Colossian who had been converted by Paul at Ephesus, had brought the faith to Colossae and probably Laodicea and Hierapolis as well.

While he was imprisoned in Rome, Paul was visited by Epaphras who reported on the dangerous doctrinal tendencies of some local teachers. These teachings were the product of both Jewish and pagan influences. Basic to them was the belief that certain angelic beings had control over human affairs, and even over all creation. It had then become a primary concern to acquire a “knowledge” of these super beings and their workings in order to appease them. This type of belief jeopardized the position of Christ, who might be considered as one of, even if the most powerful of, many mediators between God and the universe. Paul had to confront these errors vigorously and point out clearly Christ’s unique place and all-powerful cosmic role in the universe.

The Jewish influence in the attempt to combine and resolve beliefs is evident in the references to observing suggested days, seasons, circumcision, and other Jewish practices. In some circles of Judaism there was a strong belief in the mediatorship and power of the angels.

Paul had to counter these dangerous tendencies by pointing out the all-sufficiency of Christ in His role in the universe. He had to point out that the fullness of the godhead was not shared by a multitude of intermediaries; all the fullness of God and His power was in Christ Himself. By His death on the cross, Christ had won a victory over all the forces that were considered to control the universe.

¹² [Let us give] thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light.

Share in the inheritance of heaven (Romans 8:17). Inheritance is a family privilege, not a benefit for servants and slaves.

“Why does he call it an inheritance? To show that by his own achievements no one obtains the kingdom, but as an inheritance is rather the result of good fortune, so in truth it is the same principle here. For no one leads a life so good as to be counted worthy of the kingdom, but the whole is his free gift.” [Saint John Chrysostom (ca. A.D. 392), *Homilies on Colossians 2*]

¹³ He delivered us from the power of darkness

The condition of enslavement to the devil of a person in the state of sin.

and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

The initiative is with God the Father – He rescued us, brought us. Like the Israel of old, we have been delivered from captivity.

¹⁴ in whom we have redemption,

Since Christ has brought true freedom, the Colossians have no need to propitiate (appease) any of the “higher powers.”

the forgiveness of sins.

This is the effect of baptismal union with Christ.

The remainder of this reading has the character of a primitive Christian hymn, possibly having its origin in the liturgy.

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God,

Genesis 1:26 tells us that man was created in the image of God. However, only the second person of the Blessed Trinity, the Son, the New Adam, is the perfect image and likeness of the Father – all others bear the stain of sin.

the firstborn of all creation.

A position of supremacy, authority and power over all creation.

¹⁶ For in him were created

Christ is the locality, the center of unity and harmony, in which the universe was created.

all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers;

Even the invisible angelic beings who were thought to control the world were created through the Wisdom of God.

all things were created through him and for him.

The universe finds its goal and perfection in Christ.

“All things were made through him and without Him was made not a thing’ (John 1:3). From this ‘all’ nothing is exempt. Now, it is the Father who made all things through Him, whether visible or invisible, whether sensible or intelligible, whether temporal for the sake of some dispensation or eternal. These He did not make through angels or some powers that were separated from His thought.” [Saint Irenaeus (between A.D. 180-199), *Against Heresies* 22,1

¹⁷ He is before all things,

This can be seen in the sense of prior existence, or the sense of importance, or both.

and in him all things hold together.

A reference to Wisdom as the cohesive power of the universe (see Wisdom 1:7).

¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church.

For Paul, “head” signifies the principles of authority and vitality. Here, vitality means the source of life and growth, which is the Greek concept of the relation of the head to the human body. Not only is Christ the head of the cosmic body, He is the head of the Church.

“Christ is the head of the Church, if things heavenly and earthly live together in Him, such that if the whole body is ever deprived of its head, that is, separated from its Creator, there would be an insane and empty chaos.” [The Ambrosiaster (between A.D. 366-384), *Commentary on the Letter to the Colossians*]

He is the beginning,

The Church is a new beginning, a new creation (Galatians 6:15. 2 Corinthians 5:17).

the firstborn from the dead,

Christ’s own resurrection is the cause of the resurrection of those who follow Him.

that in all things he himself might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,

The concept of fullness is found in the Old Testament (Isaiah 6:3). The fullness of God – His presence, divinity, and wisdom – is in Christ who shares this with the Church, which in turn affects all humanity. The emphasis is not on God’s immanence, but on the cosmic effect of God’s power working in Christ and in the Church.

²⁰ and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross (through him), whether those on earth or those in heaven.

All creation must be restored to God (Romans 8:19-23). This implies a state of alienation: in man by reason of sin, and in all creation by the loss of unity and harmony through sin. The prevalent Jewish belief was that the world had fallen into the captivity of ruling world powers through man’s sin. Christ overcame these angelic powers by taking away their control over believers.

Gospel - Luke 23:35-43

We have now come to the conclusion of Christ's journey to Jerusalem and His passion – Christ is crucified.

³⁵ The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him

Saint Luke clearly distinguishes the people who stood silently looking on from the rulers who kept sneering at Jesus. Inspired by what they see, the people will repent of their rejection of Jesus. Luke draws upon Psalm 22:7-8 (22:8-9 in the New American Bible) to describe what is happening to Jesus.

and said, “He saved others, let him save himself

This becomes the refrain of taunting “save yourself” These taunts recall Jesus' temptations in the desert – Jesus is tempted to save His life not by giving it away but by holding on to it. What will save Jesus is His faith in a gracious God and Father, who will raise Him (and consequently us) from the dead.

if he is the chosen one,

This taunt is true.

the Messiah of God.”

This taunt is also true.

³⁶ Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine

Other translations tell us that this was sour wine. The soldiers' actions are in accord with Psalm 69:21 (69:22 in the New American Bible). John 19:30 tells us that Jesus drank this sour wine from a sponge on a hyssop branch (what the Israelites in the first Passover were to use to sprinkle the blood on their doorposts and lintel) and then said “It is finished.” What was finished? Not the task of redeeming mankind; He still had to be resurrected and ascend into heaven to accomplish that – what was finished was the fourth cup of the Passover liturgy; the liturgy which was interrupted during the last supper. Luke 22:17 tells us that after taking the third cup, Jesus said that He would not drink again until the kingdom of God comes.

³⁷ they called out, “If you are King of the Jews, save yourself.” ³⁸ Above him there was an inscription that read, “This is the King of the Jews.”

This also is true.

³⁹ Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah?

The Christian confession of faith is placed upon the lips of Jesus' mockers.

Save yourself and us.” ⁴⁰ **The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, “Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation?”** ⁴¹ **And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.”** ⁴² **Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”**

The only deathbed conversion in scripture. The criminal has deep faith that the dying Jesus is truly a king and can dispense the pardon and mercy which only a king can.

⁴³ **He replied to him, “Amen, I say to you, today**

Good Friday. In John 20:17 Jesus tells Mary Magdalene “Don't touch Me. I have not yet returned to the Father.” So if Jesus has not yet gone to heaven and no one returns from hell, where was he (and the repentant thief)? This is an example of where purgatory can be seen implicitly in scripture.

you will be with me in Paradise.”

A word derived from Old Persian, meaning a walled garden or park. It calls to mind the Garden of Eden.

St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, Picayune, MS
<http://www.scborromeo.org>