

Solemnity of Christ the King - B

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 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 - Daniel 7:13-14

Last week we heard from Daniel's fourth apocalyptic vision as our first reading and referred to our reading for today as part of our study of the Gospel. Today's first reading is from Daniel's first apocalyptic vision, the vision of the four beasts, which occupies all of chapter 7. The Jerome Biblical Commentary and The New Jerome Biblical Commentary both say that "all exegetes now agree that the four beasts of this vision stand for the four successive pagan empires:"

- a) The Babylonians
- b) The Medes
- c) The Persians

d) The Greeks

I am going to disagree. The Medes never occupied Jerusalem except as part of an alliance of Persians and Medes (call it Medo-Persian) under the leadership of Cyrus. I propose that the four successive pagan empires are instead:

- a) The Babylonians
- b) The Medo-Persians
- c) The Greeks
- d) The Romans

Each of these pagan empires occupied Jerusalem and each of the occupations ended in conversion of the occupier:

- a) Babylonians - Nebuchadnezzar - Daniel 2:47; 4:37
- b) Medo-Persians - Cyrus - 2 Chronicles 36:23; Ezra 1:2
- c) Greeks - Antiochus - 1 Maccabees 6:12-13
- d) Romans - Constantine - A.D. 313

The first three occupations ended in conversion to Judaism while the fourth and final one ended in conversion to Christianity.

Another, equally intriguing interpretation is that the fourth beast is the Maccabees. Although they were Jewish and took over from the Greeks, they were not of Davidic descent and therefore were occupiers rather than the rightful inheritors of the throne. Their influence ended when the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70.

Today's reading occurs immediately after the fourth beast has been destroyed in Daniel's vision.

13 As the visions during the night continued, I saw One like a son of man

In human form. An image appeared in the vision resembling a human being, just as the first four images resembled beasts.

coming, on the clouds of heaven;

From God. The four beasts had come “up from the sea,” from the powers of evil. Just as the four beasts are representative of kingdoms, the human form is not an individual but a symbol; a symbol of the kingdom of the saints of the Most High (verse 18).

The concept of the Son of Man eventually shifted from a figure of speech for the theocratic kingdom into a term for the messianic king himself. This change appears in Enoch, written a century or two before the time of Christ.

When he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, ¹⁴ He received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed.

2nd Reading - Revelation 1:5-8

Today’s reading, from the book of Revelation, comes from the opening greeting and doxology; the portion of any letter which was designed to identify the writer and generally heaps flowery praise on the hearer to set the mood for the teaching which will follow. In this case, the writing is to the seven churches in the province of Asia. Although the seven churches are named, and it is evident from the descriptions which follow that he had these actual churches in mind, it is thought that the universal church is also being addressed; seven being the number of the covenant, the churches being in a circular pattern on a map, and other churches were known to exist in the area.

⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness,

This is a reference to Jesus’ passion. The term “witness” (Greek: *martyr*) is one who is executed. The significance of Jesus as the “witness” is that He not only witnesses against those who are at war against God, but He also executes them.

the firstborn of the dead

By His resurrection from the dead, He has attained supremacy, having “first

place in everything” (Colossians 1:18).

and ruler of the kings of the earth.

Jesus’ exaltation. He is the universal king now, in this age – sitting at His Father’s right hand while all His enemies are being put under His feet (Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36). These three titles express the essential content of faith.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,

The precise wording of this phrase is unique in the New Testament to the book of Revelation. The basic idea is early Christian tradition (see Romans 3:21-26; Galatians 2:20).

⁶ who has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father,

Jesus’ work fulfills the covenant of Exodus 19:6 put into suspension by the sin of the golden calf. Being a kingdom means being under God’s rule rather than Satan’s. All those who hear and obey God’s word are priests: mediators between God and the rest of humanity. The Kingdom of God is at hand.

to him be glory and power forever (and ever). Amen. ⁷ Behold, he is coming amid the clouds,

This is one of the most familiar Biblical images for judgment. Here, it calls to mind Daniel 7:13, our first reading.

and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. All the peoples of the earth will lament him.

Zechariah 12:10. These two Old Testament sayings had, by the time of this writing, been interpreted as prophecies of the return of the risen Jesus as judge (see Matthew 24:30).

Yes. Amen. ⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,”

The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; the beginning and the end. (see

Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12). The fact that both God and Christ claim “I am the alpha and the omega” proved difficult for some of the earliest commentators on Revelation. Although commentators struggled to explain how the same title could be applied both to God and to Christ, Revelation itself often says of each what can be said of the other, thus highlighting the intimacy of their relationship and the oneness of their nature. The Trinitarian formula wasn’t developed until the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 381).

says the Lord God,

This is the first of only two passages in Revelation in which God is identified explicitly as the speaker (the other is 21:5-8). He is the eternal and unchangeable source and goal of all history (Romans 11:36).

“the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty.”

Gospel - John 18:33b-37

Because the Gospel of Mark is so short, and this being the last Sunday in the current cycle (Cycle B), we turn to the Gospel of John to see Jesus’ kingship described. Ordinarily when we think of kingship we imagine palaces, royal robes, sumptuous banquets, silver and gold, power and glory. But today we hear about truth, betrayal, blood, death and bitter lamentation

Jesus has been arrested and the High Priest Annas has finished his interrogation the previous evening, and finding nothing wrong, sent Him to another high priest, Caiaphas. We were told the night was cold, and twice Peter was described as warming himself near the charcoal fire. At daybreak (Good Friday) Jesus was brought to Pilate who was unable to secure a clear indictment from the crowd and so has summoned Jesus inside the praetorium (Roman courtroom) to make a private inquiry of Jesus.

The contempt with which Pilate and the Jews regarded one another is well known. Pilate’s questioning does not necessarily mean that he is unaware of the attitude of these men toward Jesus, but he is asking for a charge against him which will have validity in Roman law. This, Jesus’ enemies did not conclusively have, hence their initial effort to bluster Pilate into doing their

will without hearing specific charges. Pilate has refused to involve himself under those terms and has forced the Jews to speak bluntly of their designs on Jesus' life.

The Gospel of John is unique in that, unlike the other three gospels, John places Jesus' death on the cross on a different date. The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) all show the Last Supper as being a Passover meal with Jesus' sacrifice occurring the next day. John, because of his emphasis upon the Eucharist, places Jesus' death at the same time as the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. Saint John draws heavily from Old Testament Passover imagery in his narrative:

Only in John do we hear Jesus being declared "The Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36).

John is very careful to place Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the day when the Jews are to procure the lamb for the Passover meal (Palm Sunday); they are to observe the lamb for four days to ensure that it is free from any blemishes before the animal is sacrificed (Exodus 12:3-6).

John has Pilate, after carefully examining Jesus, declare that He is without blemish: "he again went out to the Jews and said to them, 'I find no guilt in him'" (John 18:38); "Once more Pilate went out and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no guilt in him'" (John 19:4); "Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him. I find no guilt in him'" (John 19:6), at which point He is sent to be sacrificed. It is of Pilate's examination of Jesus that we hear about today.

John goes on to report that Jesus' sacrifice on the altar of the cross satisfies the requirements for the Passover lamb: "But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. ... For this happened so that the scripture passage might be fulfilled: 'Not a bone of it will be broken' [Exodus 12:46]" (John 19:33-34, 36).

All this is to show that Jesus becomes the sacrifice of the New Passover, the meal which Jesus promises in His Bread of Life Discourse (John 6:25-70). He becomes the meal which must be eaten if we are to be part of the covenant

(Exodus 12:8).

33b [Pilate said to Jesus,] “Are you the King of the Jews?”

There is nothing in the preceding narrative which would prepare us for this question. Saint John presupposes that Pilate has obtained more precise information about Jesus than that contained in his discussion with the Jews in verses 30-32. Events such as those Saint John describes in 6:15 and 12:12 could have been used as a source of denouncing Jesus as the leader of a nationalist movement, the only charge that would be taken seriously by the Romans.

34 Jesus answered, “Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?”

By replying with another question, Jesus is not refusing to answer – He is trying to make clear, as He has always done, that His mission is a spiritual one. [compare with Jesus’ response to Peter’s profession (Matthew 16:17)]. Pilate’s question is not an easy one to answer. To a Gentile, a king of the Jews is a subverter of the Empire. To a Jewish nationalist, the King-Messiah was a political-religious liberator who would obtain their freedom from Rome.

35 Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me.

Pilate’s scorn for the Jews is made evident. He is there to look out for the affairs of the Empire.

What have you done?”

Have you done something which should concern the Empire?

36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world.

Jesus’ answer separates His kingship from anything that could threaten the Empire, since He claims that it can be proved that His kingship is not of this world. He has no followers fighting to secure His release. After the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, Jesus fled because the people wanted

to proclaim Him an earthly king (John 6:15). However, Jesus did enter Jerusalem in triumph, and He did accept acclamation as King-Messiah (John 12:13). He acknowledges before Pilate that He is truly a king – but He also makes it clear that His kingship is not an earthly one.

If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants (would) be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews.

Jesus' reference to "the Jews" separates Him from those who have already rejected Him.

But as it is, my kingdom is not here." ³⁷ So Pilate said to him, "Then you are a king?"

Like a courtroom today, just answer "yes" or "no". Pilate wants a direct answer.

Jesus answered, "You say I am a king.

In Pilate's sense of the word, Jesus is not a king. In another sense, as Jesus has already implied by speaking of His kingdom, He is a king.

For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

He is not a worldly king, but a king who "came into the world" to testify to the truth. In the last verses we hear the Word in this gospel. (see John 1:14, 17; 8:32; 14:6; 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 17:17-19)

Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Jesus implicitly calls on Pilate to take a stand – on the side of truth and life, or with those who have rejected Him.