



Christ the King

THE NEW SHOFAR

**Christ – King of Kings, Lord of Lords, our Saviour
Without Christ as our hope, there is no enduring hope**

The recent origins of the Feast of Christ the King

While the idea of Christ being the one reigning over a kingdom goes back to biblical times, the actual Feast of Christ the King was officially established by Pius XI in 1925. It instituted as a Christian response to the rise of secularism and nationalism., as an antidote to the arrogance of attempts at a godless world. World War I had devastated Europe, Mussolini had seized power in Italy and European countries were losing power and status around the world. Stalin had seized control of the Soviet Union, and many of these new leaders were executing Christians, persecuting the Church and essentially declaring their independence from God. What Pius XI wanted to do was remind the Church and the world, with the institution of the Feast of Christ the King, exactly who was the *true and enduring* leader over the nations and peoples. It is Christ who is King.

Our God reigns

A fundamental question to ask of today's feast is: *over what kind of Kingdom is Christ reigning?* We live in a world where any thought of having an absolute monarch ruling over our everyday activities is anathema. It is bad enough having local councils deciding on what rubbish is to be put in what rubbish bins so having a king is not an attractive revelation for many. But the kingship of Christ is radically different because he declared publicly how the *Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve!* While there can be no doubting the absolute nature of Christ's kingship, it manifests itself in ways radically different to that of human rulers.

This is why most biblical scholars today would prefer to talk in terms of the *reign of God* rather than *the Kingdom of God*. This is because having God *reigning* is a profession of faith. A guarantee and a source of comfort and consolation. That reign may not always be self-evident at times – especially in those times of darkness, when we are suffering, afraid, uncertain or feel inadequate to the task of life. But it is precisely in those times that the guarantee of Christ *reigning* becomes such a solid rock of hope for us. *Reigning* is what Christ does, it is who he is and it is an ongoing, ever-present reality in the daily lives of all men and women. All that is needed to enjoy the blessings of such *reigning* is to humbly and in repentance, place ourselves under Christ's rule.

How do we live under the reigning Christ?

It would be a mistake to believe the King has not set down a series of directions as to how his followers were to live in these new times. The *Way* of Christ goes back to the Hebrew Scriptures, to what God his Father had in mind when the divine creative works began and to what had been revealed to prophets by God down through Israel's history. At the centre of this sits the Ten

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Commandments. What Jesus did was reveal, in his own way of living and through his teachings, the true meaning of these earlier revelations. The Way of Christ is not a collection of laws carved onto tablets but a series of invitations, expectations and responsibilities that are written into the hearts of believers and into the collective responsibility of the faith community. They can be summed up by two commandments – *love God with every aspect of your being and love your neighbour in the same way you love yourself*. After ensuring our thoughts, words and deeds are within these two commandments, we can do whatsoever we like in life.

Characteristics of a disciple living under the Heavenly King

Whenever an opportunity presented itself, Jesus exhorted his hearers (in his parables in particular), to humble and persevering prayer, to vigilance, to the good use of the gifts and graces which had been lent to them by God. Then he emphatically required of them that they should practice meekness, forgiveness of injuries, mercy, kindness; they should have a practical love of their neighbour to be manifested in deeds; they must be detached from earthly things and resolute in the serving of God. And, because our King is *reigning*, we do these almost impossible things, fulfil these counter cultural demands with divine grace empowering and enlightening us all the way. Christ our King demands and the same Christ the King enables. He is a King amidst his people.

Christ the King – a model for all Christians

I searched the internet for pictures of Christ the King and after looking at 250+ images, I found only two that were in any way reflective of the truth today's feast. In the New Testament, Christ reigns from the cross. That is the mystery of the divine ways. He could have had all of the glories of heaven, exist surrounded by myriads of angels but instead *he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even when that death was death on a cross*. That is not the way of the world. It is difficult to imagine Donald Trump and the world "humble" coexisting, but the Way of the *reigning* Christ is all about living that others may know his Father's love and saving mercy.

Christ is our King, not our mate and certainly not our best "buddy"

Soppy spirituality in recent decades has so diminished the separation between the divine and the human that it sometimes seems as though there is some kind of basic, inalienable human right to look upon God eyeball to eyeball. Today's feast, while celebrating the presence of the *reigning* Christ within the midst of our daily activities, a divine source of grace and heavenly power alongside us as we take up the daily challenges of being disciples in a godless world, is a reminder of how the way to come before God is on our knees. Humble and repentant. Christ the King celebrations are a way to remind ourselves of how he is our Heavenly King enthroned on high, the King of King and Lord of Lords. Having celebrated this reality, we can then go further and celebrate the other great gift – he became *as one of us*.

And let's not forget this same Christ the King will be returning on a cloud, as judge of the living and the dead when God his Father calls time on creation. In our celebrations we are reminded of the need to *prepare*, to learn to humble ourselves, to repent of our sins, failings and arrogant ways, to get back to the basics of our discipleship and live as servants of the Great King.

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