The resurrection of Jesus changes the face of death for all His people. Death is no longer a prison, but a passage into God's presence. Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won't stay there…John Stott

November 24th **The Shofar** Christ our King

The Feast of Christ the King

On the last Sunday of the liturgical year, Christians celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King, a feast designed to give special recognition to the dominion Christ our Lord has over all aspects of our lives. But is it relevant today, having Christ as our King??

About a hundred years ago, "the war to end all wars" (World War I) had just taken between 15 and 22 million lives. This was, to understate the situation, a catastrophic shock to the culture of Europe, the heart of the western Christian world at the time. At the same time, to the east in Orthodox Christian Russia, the October Revolution of 1917 led to the murder of the Romanov royal family in 1918 and culminated in the establishment of the Soviet Union by the Bolsheviks in 1923.

Hundreds of thousands of people were killed in the intervening years of Red Terror. Many millions more were murdered or starved in the years that followed. Meanwhile, the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic infected a third of the world's population and caused some 17 to 50 million deaths. Upheaval was everywhere. Governments were reconstituting, borders were shifting, laws were unstable, and society was unmoored. All told, it was a time of great, great hardship and suffering.

The Church calls the world to a shakeup

When Pope Pius XI was elected, much of the world was in shambles. The year was 1922, and the widespread peace and tranquillity promised were not evident. Quite the opposite.

The war to end all wars had been especially devastating to England and the countries of continental Europe. Additionally, the overthrow of the Romanov tsars by the Russian Revolution had created great upheaval in Russia and brought immense suffering. Governments were in economic chaos, unemployment was rampant and people in many places were literally starving to death.

The stability of the old social and political orders that had embraced royal houses and crowned heads of state were crumbling. The victorious warring powers sought severe penalties and unreasonable reparations from the vanquished Germans through the Treaty of Versailles.

Pessimism, and an overwhelming sense of helplessness was everywhere and consequently, the time was ripe for the rise of tyrants and rise they did. The festering philosophies of fascism, National Socialism (the Nazis) and communism now spawned the likes of Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin. The pope's words at the time were prescient: *There can be no stable peace or lasting treaties, though made after long and difficult negotiations and duly signed, unless there be a return of mutual charity to appease hate and banish enmity*.

The world was desperate for signs of hope

In their distress, people clung to anyone who offered them some kind of direction out of the chaos and promised to put food on their tables. Sadly, they gravitated to the emerging dictators, and as they did, they often sought to be self-sufficient to the exclusion of God from their everyday lives.

The basics of morality and the teachings of the Church we declared to be out of date in such a modern world and were certain that Christ Himself had no place in the public world.

Some political regimes even advocated the banishment of Jesus altogether, not only from society, but from the family as well. As nations were reborn and governments restructured, their foundations, policies and laws were often being fashioned without regard to Christian principles. Not unlike today, people were desperate, starving for hope, for a solid foundation on which they could rebuild their lives.

Secularism Vs the Kingdom of God

In all these developments, as millions were denying Christ in favour of the seductive lifestyles dominated by secularism, material wealth and false hope, the world was in desperate need of the Light of Christ.

1925, was a jubilee year, one celebrating the 1,600th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. The council fathers taking part in that ancient gathering in A.D. 325 had affirmed the full divinity of Jesus Christ as God the Son, one in being with God the Father. Their pronouncement became a statement that was expanded into the Nicene Creed.

Throughout that anniversary year, the kingship of Christ was a feature of most of the formal celebrations and commemorations. They reminded Christians of the declaration made in the creeds: "*His kingdom will have no end."*

On Dec. 11 of the jubilee year, and to acknowledge perpetually the supremacy of Jesus Christ over all men, nations and earthly allegiances, the Feast of Christ the King was instituted.

The feast reminded the people that Jesus Christ is not only King of this world, reigning among nations today; He is also the eternal King, glorified by the saints in heaven, who will one day come to judge all humankind.

It was a feast standing in contrast to the continuing disorder dominating that era. The inaugurating document pointedly reminded national governments that, even while they seek to push faith in Jesus Christ to the periphery of human life, Christ continued to reign. His divine kingship did not need their formal acceptance or approval.

The feast was changed to the last Sunday in the liturgical year, emphasizing even more strongly the connection between Christ's kingship and His second advent (coming) to judge the world.

Today, peace still eludes us; social, political and economic orders are shaking; and the nations continue in many ways to reject the light of the Gospel. We can be grateful, then, for the chance to celebrate each year the Solemnity of Christ the King — for the world needs now, more than ever, our witness to His rule over all things. The remedy to chaos is still Christ.

On the kingship of Christ

The rebellion of individuals and states against the authority of Christ has produced deplorable consequences … the seeds of discord sown far and wide; those bitter enmities and rivalries between nations, which hinder the cause of peace; the seemingly insatiable levels of greed; a blind and immoderate selfishness, making people seek little more than their own comfort and advantage, and measure everything by these; the unity and stability of the family undermined; society, in a word, shaken to its foundations is on the way to ruin.

The Kingly Power of Jesus Christ

In what does this "power" of Jesus Christ the King consist? It is ***not*** the power of the kings or the great people of this world. It is the divine power to give eternal life, to liberate from evil, to defeat the dominion of death. It is the power of Love that can draw good from evil, that can melt a hardened heart, bring peace amid the harshest conflict and kindle hope in the thickest darkness. This Kingdom of Grace is never imposed and always respects our freedom. Christ came "to bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18: 37), as he declared to Pilate: whoever accepts his witness serves beneath his "banner" which is the cross. Every conscience, therefore, must make a choice. Who do I want to follow? God or the Evil One? The truth or falsehood? Choosing Christ does not guarantee success according to the world's criteria but assures the peace and joy that he alone can give us. Christ is the only enduring way to world Peace.

Unlike the kings and powerful leaders of this world, Jesus offered himself on the cross and radically redefined and transformed the concept of kingship into love incarnate. Jesus' death and resurrection was as revolutionary as his life. He subverted the image of kingship in his birth, death, and resurrection, and invites us to be born again in him and to be raised to new life in him. This context of Jesus' passion is essential for those who wish to celebrate the Feast of Christ the King.

The world's only enduring Hope resides with the King who was enthroned on the cross, a destiny he offers to all those who seek to live in His Kingdom.