

Christ the King

Psalm 2

(Book of Common Prayer pp. 345-346)

1 Why do the heathen rage , and the people imagine a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, 3 Let us break their bands asunder , and cast away their cords from us. 4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh : the Lord shall have them in derision . 5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. 6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. 7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. 8 Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. 9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. 10 Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed , ye judges of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry , and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

The Feast of Christ the King is of recent origin, having been instituted by the Roman Catholic Church in 1925, and adopted by a number of other churches subsequently, including many Anglican churches. It is included in the Anglican Missal, together with the Propers (the Scripture texts) that we have been read today. As I read portions of the Encyclical in which Pius XI founded this feast, it is worth remembering the world conditions in which it was written. It was a time of great upheaval and change. And yet these words are no less applicable to our own times. Describing the rising secularism, he notes: (*see attachment*).

It was hoped that an annual proclamation of the Kingship of Jesus Christ in the form of a new church feast day would serve as a restrainer on this spirit, and remind nations and individuals that their sovereignty is derived from the true Sovereign, who now reigns invisibly, but will consummate this rule by His visible return. Subsequent events and attitudes would seem to indicate that men have given this effort very little attention.

I want to focus on our own day, however. In what ways is the great King rejected now? The arrogant disregard of God that is characteristic of this culture reminds me of the spirit of Psalm 2, the most frequently quoted psalm in the New Testament:

Why do the heathen rage , and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his Anointed saying, Let us break their bands asunder , and cast away their cords from us. (Ps. 2:1-3)

The attitude of resistance to and rebellion *against the LORD, and his Anointed* [the English rendering of the Greek *Christ* or the Hebrew *Messiah*] takes a different and peculiar form. In the past, upon which the present is very much founded, it has meant the flourishing of Enlightenment and humanistic thought, which dared to do the unimaginable: outrightly reject the authority of Scripture and the place of the Church, substituting in their vacated spot the mind, wisdom, reason, and power of Man. This was accomplished with much self-glorying exultation and supreme confidence in the future, and, with the rise of science and technology, an assurance that man was

well on the way to solving his own problems without having to be bothered with worshipping a God who imposes laws, restraints, and divine expectations. This rush to prove that Man had indeed finally come of age was fueled by theologies that rejected the deity of Christ, discounted divine revelation, and envisioned God as just a manageable concept.

But *He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh : the Lord shall have them in derision* (vs. 4). The chaos of two world wars, the rise of despotic systems, often claiming their basis in the fruit of the Enlightenment, and the unthinkable scenarios that have characterized the last century, have served to deflate these expectations considerably. A tremendous dilemma is left to those who have trustingly walked this path: if God has no authority, and Man cannot be relied upon, what is left?

Paralysis is the result. Perhaps it can be best expressed in that grand mantra: *Whatever...!* “Do whatever you feel like doing, as long as you’re not hurting anyone else.” “Don’t go trying to force your belief system on me.” “God and I have an agreement” (which is another way of saying, ‘He minds His business, and I mind mine!’). “You think Jesus is the only way to God? That’s cool. I don’t believe in anything.” A facade of absolute non-involvement and grand unconcern covers up the fact that the culture has given up exercising itself to draw any meaningful conclusions. The nonchalance only masks great uneasiness of soul that is absolutely drowned out in a ceaseless stream of music and entertainment. A generation without ideals is the consequence, who have allowed themselves to become nothing more than repositories for whatever things money-driven consumerism is more than willing to instantly provide them, for a fee.

Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure (vs. 5). Efforts to dismiss God, whether actively through outright atheism or passively by merely just ignoring Him, invite the judgment of God, whose absolutes remain unaltered by the very best efforts man has made to challenge them. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* warns the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Romans chapter 1 describes the evolving process of God’s wrath, which culminates in His *giving over* of the unrepentant to their lusts and perversions. There could hardly be more frightening words in all of Scripture: *God gave them up...* (Romans 1:24).

Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee (vv. 6, 7). Today, even now, Jesus Christ is enthroned upon the holy hill of heaven’s Zion. His eyes behold at once the entire span of the earth and the whole course of its history. He neglects no detail, nor does He miss the grander scenarios played out among nations. *Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession* (vs. 8). These He possesses not only because they have been conferred upon Him by His Father, but because He has purchased *every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation* by His own blood (Rev. 5:9).

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (vs. 9). This is the ultimate fate of any who finally resist the lordship and kingship of our

Savior Jesus Christ. None will be spared, for *they are without excuse* (Romans 1:20b). It is utterly beyond us what His *rod of iron* implies as He wields it to *break them*, nor what being *dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel* means. These are words filled with finality. Once *broken*, and *dashed* to pieces by the omnipotent hand of God's Son, the King, there is no possibility of recovery.

Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth (vs. 10). Psalm 2 is a warning in advance. But warnings require messengers, for the uninformed can claim that they had no idea of what was coming. It is here that we begin to ponder our own role as God's Church in this scheme of things. But a Church that has blunted its message to suit its enemies is disqualified, and a Church that lives a life that belies its message is valueless. *Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling* (vs. 11). Here is the Gospel! We rejoice, because this very same King has died for our sins, and we have received salvation through Him. We *serve Him* as the only just response to such love and grace, in view of His absolute right to dispense wrath and judgment in their stead. Our service and joy are always tempered with *fear* and *trembling*, a theme that cannot be dismissed as merely a reflection of Old Testament attitudes (see Philippians 2:12b), because this One whom we reverence is great, indeed.

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him (vs. 12). This is the final sentence of the psalm. *Kiss* here means "to do homage" to the Son. From the vantage point of the New Testament, we have an extraordinarily broad perspective on the reason to do so, which the writer of Psalm 2 lacked: through the entire ministry of our Lord — His incarnation, His teaching and miracles, His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension — His demonstrated love for us is truly without bounds. To spurn such love can only be the worst of all improprieties, one worthy of *his wrath*.

Have we indeed *kissed the Son*? Have we even gotten close enough to do so? *Blessed are all they that put their trust in him* (vs. 12b). It is the mission of the Church to proclaim all of these things both through lives and words.

This is a hard sell in an age and in a place where the problem isn't so much open hostility, but yawning indifference, one that is hardened almost to the point of impenetrability by the distractions that have ruined the soul's natural capacity to hear and take in anything spiritual. It will take many, repeated demonstrations of persistent love, of constancy, of devotion to friends, family, and community that are "loud enough" in volume to get through the noise of the ever-present competition.

But God is able, and we are able, through Him.

Then will others join with us as fellow-citizens of the Kingdom in proclaiming the eternal reign of Jesus Christ, the King.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

-Feast of Christ the King-

The Feast of Christ the King (in the Latin Rite of the Roman Catholic Church, properly the **Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe**) is a relatively recent addition to the western liturgical calendar, having been instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI. In 1970 its observance was adopted by Anglicans, Lutherans, and many other Protestants.

Pope Pius XI instituted the Feast of Christ the King in an 1925 encyclical letter, in response to growing nationalism and secularism. The letter established the Feast of Christ the King^[1] which was Pope Pius XI's response to the world's increasing secularization and nationalism.

Portions:

“While nations insult the beloved name of our Redeemer by suppressing all mention of it in their conferences and parliaments, we must all the more loudly proclaim his kingly dignity and power, all the more universally affirm his rights...When we pay honor to the princely dignity of Christ, men will doubtless be reminded that the Church, founded by Christ as a perfect society, has a natural and inalienable right to perfect freedom and immunity from the power of the state; and that in fulfilling the task committed to her by God of teaching, ruling, and guiding to eternal bliss those who belong to the kingdom of Christ, she cannot be subject to any external power.”

Speaking of the rise of secularism:

“This evil spirit, as you are well aware, Venerable Brethren, has not come into being in one day; it has long lurked beneath the surface. The empire of Christ over all nations was rejected. The right which the Church has from Christ himself, to teach mankind, to make laws, to govern peoples in all that pertains to their eternal salvation, that right was denied. Then gradually the religion of Christ came to be likened to false religions and to be placed ignominiously on the same level with them. It was then put under the power of the state and tolerated more or less at the whim of princes and rulers. Some men went even further, and wished to set up in the place of God's religion a natural religion consisting in some instinctive affection of the heart. There were even some nations who thought they could dispense with God, and that their religion should consist in impiety and the neglect of God. The rebellion of individuals and states against the authority of Christ has produced deplorable consequences. We lament them: the seeds of discord sown far and wide; those bitter enmities and rivalries between nations, which still hinder so much the cause of peace; that insatiable greed which is so often hidden under a pretense of public spirit and patriotism, and gives rise to so many private quarrels; a blind and immoderate selfishness, making men seek nothing but their own comfort and advantage, and measure everything by these; no peace in the home, because men have forgotten or neglect their duty; the unity and stability of the family undermined; society in a word, shaken to its foundations and on the way to ruin.”