

**OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE
THIRTY-FOURTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
LAST WEEK IN THE 2018 LITURGICAL YEAR**

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WHAT IS CHRIST'S KINGSHIP?

A reflection by Dom Alban Boulwood, OSB

The title “king” doesn’t mean anything very concrete to most of us because kingship is no longer an ordinary form of governance and authority among us. In an odd way, this matches the biblical evidence that Christ refused to let himself be make a king in any ordinary sense of that word. Yet it is true for us, as for all past Christian believers, that God has made Christ king over all creation; in Jesus all things find their purpose, all people find their salvation, and everything finds its fulfillment. The incarnate Son is the only mediator of God’s plan of divine love’s fulfillment. It is in that love that all creation comes to the Heavenly Father. When we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we often sing the old hymn: “What Child is this?” We find it natural to respond, “This is Christ the king!”

As he died on the cross, Pilate fixed above his head a sign: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews”. He was mocking the Jewish leaders rather than Christ, but we still react by reaffirming that Jesus is indeed the true king of all peoples and that his death wins a definitive victory over all the “powers of death”. Christ won it through a love that is stronger than all the powers of our world.

It is a fact of faith that Christ receives power from above and from perfect union with the will of our Heavenly Father and has a kingship “in” this world but not “of” this world. Christ entered completely into the human condition, including suffering and death. In Jesus a perfect solution was achieved to the inner dividedness that permeates human living and gets in the way of the working of grace as was once the case; it is an obstacle no more. We and creation have been transformed by grace and it no longer calls us to sin. From it we hear the voice of God calling us to life everlasting.

The kingship of Christ is the universal renewal and glorification of everyone: “Take courage, I have overcome the world!” Christ does this as the only-begotten Son of the Heavenly Father; in principle, this kingship is Christ’s by right. But he also freely offered himself in loving obedience to the Heavenly Father and restores to all things their orientation to God and to love and to supporting a fullness of life.

This points out to us how we are to come to our Heavenly Father and to reign with Christ. We receive all that Christ has and is as a free gift. We receive all this by freely giving ourselves freely in following Christ even to the cross. We freely accept our mortality and the need for transformation and self-giving. We do this by grace. That is why Christ’s followers in his royal priesthood will always form a suffering, serving, loving Church.

We too inherit the kingship which is Jesus birthright and as well as a free gift from the Heavenly Father. In that way we also inherit Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection, and we help accomplish this by and in the witness that is our personal life. *“We fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body the Church.”* This is the dignity and the responsibility of the Christian vocation, which is our vocation.

RECOGNIZING & HONORING OUR TEACHERS

Developed from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

When Jesus approached the town of Naim he met a funeral procession. He stopped it and said to the dead man: “Get up!” When we think of our dead, do we think of them as merely dead? Or is ours an encounter with Jesus who says to us: Look, new possibilities are here for people who accept my new life! When we contemplate our dead, we naturally think of the lives each of them led. We need to ask what sort of possibilities for our lives their lives bring to our attention?

Have you ever tried to share with others the message of your dead about the Lord? Have you thought carefully about what their examples can mean for you and those with whom you share it?

Recall the parable of the Seven Wise & Foolish Bridesmaids. As they come to the door and ask to come in, the Lord responds: Who are you? Doesn’t Jesus keep asking you that same question? You can’t reply by telling him who your parents were or what church you attend or what jobs you do. You might have to answer: “I am one of those who love you and have been found by you, and have learned from you; and most of all, I have learned I am yours forever!”

If you think about the matter, isn’t it a fact that our dead ask us about the same question and want us to give that answer? We can’t respond rightly by talking about purely human ties—belonging to a church or community or family. They have all answered this question, and in more or less the words I put into the mouths of the late coming bridesmaids. The message they have for us is that we must remind ourselves to reply to our Lord’s question as they did and daily.

The Lord first sought me in my family and among my relatives and friends. Then he taught me in school and through my church community. The Lord sought me among all those who had shared experiences that had led them to God and God’s way. Then they taught me that the way of God is the only way that leads to what is good and beautiful.

The Lord has spoken to us through these people, many of them individuals we remember today when we pray for and with our dead. The Lord spoke to us through them, directly or indirectly. Using their own words or the memories of them that others shared with us we speak to yet others. But deeper than this, the Lord speaks to us as directly, as he did to that dead youth he encountered at the gates of Naim.

At some point, Jesus spoke directly and personally to each of us: “Get up!”, he said. Our personal life is unique and God wants to share it with us, and that means we have to want to share our everything with God. All those who have gone before us have only prepared us to hear these words, and shown us how they answered them! Now it is our turn. Today they remind us of all this. Get up and live the life of Christ anew.

BECOMING GOD'S KINGDOM

A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard

When Jesus was conceived the angel promised that he would receive the throne of his father, David. You have heard that often enough, but have you asked yourself how that promise is to be fulfilled? After all, Jesus never reigned in Jerusalem and refused to let himself be made king over Israel. Standing before Pilate Jesus even protested that his kingdom isn't of this world.

Part of the answer lies in the fact that there will be a new and heavenly Jerusalem and a heavenly Zion and that in heaven the only throne is not merely symbolic and earthly but eternal and fully real.

Now think of the rest of the angel's promise, "He will reign over the House of Jacob forever". Once again, if we understand this in an earthly and time-bound way it doesn't make sense. But if we understand it as meaning he will reign in the hearts of those who give themselves to God and supplant the devil as giver of hope, then it can be literally true.

Supplanting the devil means struggling against vices and evil desires. We want God and God's will to fill our heart and guide our use of our bodily members. Jesus reigns now only in grace but soon he will reign in glory. He will reign in the hearts of all those who believe and follow him and will reign there forever. Yes, God's Kingdom is the heart of each believer and faithful follower. God's Kingdom is my heart and yours.

How glorious that Kingdom will be where all are united contemplating God's splendor and shining like the sun with God's power and glory. God grant that Jesus, out of his love, may remember me on that day and deliver me from all that blocks his reign in my heart!

Come, Lord Jesus! Take away every stumbling block to the realization of your Kingdom in my heart and soul. You ought to reign in me, so let it happen fully. Greed for this or that often came and claimed the throne in me; arrogance often sought to dominate me; pride sought to be my king. Comfort and pleasure have said, we shall reign in you! Ambition, detraction, envy, and anger have competed for supremacy in my heart. At times they seemed to have me entirely in their power. But I have resisted, insofar as I could.

I struggled against them and I win insofar as I have God's help and that of Jesus. Lord Jesus, I acknowledge your right to reign in me. You are God. You are my Lord. I keep myself for you! I declare to all: I will have no King but the Lord Jesus! Come, then, my Lord and drive away all that would claim me and let your own power alone prevail in me. You are my king and my God and you grant victory to Jacob. Establish that victory in my heart and my life so that I may always be yours.

HOW SEEING SIGNS CAN LEAD US TO GOD

A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

As long as there have been Christians they have constantly looked for signs of the coming of Christ. They have found signs in the natural world as well as the world as created by human ingenuity. Some people make fun of this and claim only the uneducated and uncultured see signs everywhere, as though earthquakes, storms, harvest failures and diseases were something extraordinary. In fact, the educated and the powerful often do this too, but they are thinking of wars, revolutions and the like.

Actually, people see events as signs because their hearts are awake with longing for Christ and they see everything out of the ordinary as a reminder that God is the Lord of nature and of history and of all events. Since Jesus' own disciples did this too, we shouldn't find it surprising. And, indeed, Jesus himself shared these attitudes. He says that there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars and that on earth there will be distress among nations and that people will get terrified by what is happening around them, and think this means that the natural powers of the world are failing and that means that what we know is passing away and will be replaced by the more immediate rule of God.

Clearly there isn't anything ridiculous about such thinking and there certainly isn't any particular harm in it. When people live from faith, they imagine that what is happening within them, as they are transformed, is happening in the outer world too. Seeing signs in things and events only reflects a religious and faith inspired way of understanding life.

Yet if, as we find in Scripture, the "world" is opposed to God and the "order of the world" as human beings create it, is opposed to the ordering of everything in terms of its relation to God. But how can things of that same "world" be signs of God's presence and transforming and redeeming power and love as well as dangers because they aren't God-oriented?

Granted all I have said, granted the vastness and mystery of the world and the ways it is borne in upon us, how could we not think that there is nothing here below that isn't connected to the Plan God has for saving and drawing all things into unity in Christ? For all we know each event has a connection with every other event.

Perhaps, then, God is teaching us and offering us insight and knowledge about his ways. If we are only willing to open our eyes maybe we can see the hand of God working for the good of all creation. The Scripture tells us that the very hairs of our heads are numbered by God. All things are ours and all things work together to realize our good and, in its own way, that holds true generally. Let's, then, look for the Lord's presence in everything that happens, no matter how trivial it may seem.

To the ears of faith even what sounds bad doesn't happen without the permission of God. We hear God's footsteps everywhere. Seeing signs of God's presence is a way of seeing signs of God's coming. More important, it is a way of causing us to keep watch for that coming which will bring all into the immediate presence of God. Keep watch and pray! We are commanded to do this.

THE WATER THAT FLOWS FROM GOD'S TEMPLE

From a commentary on Ezekiel by Denis the Carthusian

The prophet Ezekiel tells us that in a vision he saw water flowing out from the Temple of God and bringing life to everyone and everything it touched. That can easily be understood as a kind of figure of the water that flowed from Christ's pierced side and brought new life to all of us.

Of course, since God brings salvation through many means, this interpretation can also reveal to us that Scripture is such a stream of water and that the Holy Church is another. Even more helpful, this water may be seen as Christ bringing joy to all who open their hearts when he knocks and let him enter their hearts and lives.

One is reminded of Isaiah's words, "*with joy you will draw water from the fountains of the Savior*". Christ himself said, "*whoever drinks the water that I will give shall never thirst again*". Ezekiel pictures this water flowing downward because it primarily transforms those who are humble of heart.

Ezekiel says that "living water will flow out of Jerusalem" and for us that clearly means that it will flow from Christ's passion, death and resurrection. He says it will flow down into the Dead Sea and transform its waters so that the sea abounds with life.

The world, if left to itself, can only bring death, as salt water kills living things. The entire world would be a dead place if no one lived by grace and love. This is one of the great gifts of the water of baptism and, indeed, all who open themselves to the grace of this sacrament are transformed and made well. The hearts of the wicked are delivered from the death-dealing wickedness in which they have been living.

The vision of Ezekiel is of a miracle. As it flows it multiplies itself and becomes a river that more and more transforms everything it touches. It is from the offering of Christ this transformation comes and the continual widening of the vision-river shows us how that it will impact everyone.

The number of believers is ever increasing and they will end up filling the entire earth. It brings to everyone grace and the grace of loving one another just as Christ has loved each and all of us.

That is the point of seeing visions and signs. They are calls to live the grace and love that is constantly flowing into our hearts and longs to flow out and transform all whom we touch. All you willing to let this happen through your life? That is God's Plan for redeeming us and all, and transforming the whole earth. It begins with the little things we do in order to show his love to others.

FINDING CHRIST IN ALL THINGS

Developed from a sermon by St. Bernard

We have all heard that when St. Andrew, whose feast is now at hand, was brought to his cross he cried out: "Oh good cross, I have longed for you now for a long time, and so I come to you confident and rejoicing!" This is the voice of a person who has been transformed and risen from the goods of nature to those of grace. He glories even in trials and sufferings. This is what the apostles did when the Council of the Sanhedrin flogged them. Andrew rejoiced in being found worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. His words and example are a call to us.

Do you perhaps think that you can't fix your gaze in meditation on what are eternal goods? Do you think them too distant, too unlike anything you know, so they can't lead you to virtue? But if you welcome such difficulties even as St. Andrew welcomed the cross, you may see how a pure conscience is attained and how confidence in God may bring you to charity and chastity and patience and humility.

All these virtues make one beautiful and loveable before God. So too, as you learn them you become conciliatory and pleasing to others, and, even more important, you become worthy of imitation. If this seems too sublime and beyond one as weak as you know yourself to be, then you should remember those who have gone before you.

We are surrounded by the beauties and good things of the natural world. We must not think of them as if they didn't hold graces for us; they were created and formed in certain ways so that they would point to God, and even before our first parents sinned. God intended, as St. Paul reminds us, that we not begin from what is spiritual but from what is natural.

There are many goods of the body, and they all pertain to health. But nothing beyond what is needed for health is to be sought from them. We shouldn't look for anything beyond their natural beauty from what is in this world for even service of our bodily health can contain a pitfall. For doing what brings health also brings pleasure and one can end up serving pleasure rather than using it to serve health and use health to serve God. Beware those who use nature only for pleasure and put pleasure in a place that belongs only to God.

The human mind and heart are made to lead us to the vision of our Creator. That is why one must be very careful to cultivate purity of heart, to focus all our attention and love on God who made and redeemed us. We must confess purely and humbly to the Lord that we can only have such purity of heart if it is given us.

We, so to speak, owe health to our bodies and purity to our hearts our longings not be separated from God. We must help each other. This means cultivating the peace which we owe to others. What we wish to have done for us let us do for others, as God's commandment requires.

How is all this possible. St. Andrew shows is possible through the grace of seeking only to become more and more like Christ. That is why he loved the cross. In seeking and treasuring it we become like our Lord. We learn to seek God and purity of heart and to love and live in peace with one another. Seek these things first and God and everything else will be given you in addition.

‘APOSTOLATE’ MEANS BRINGING CHRIST TO THE WORLD

Developed from homilies by St. Pope John XXIII

In its deepest meaning, the word ‘apostolate’ means something beautiful; it means bringing Christ to a world ignorant of its deepest and most delight-filled meaning. That is what Blessed Mary did, as a virgin and as a mother; she brings a hope which had been unknown and not even imagined. It is a hope that no one had known was real, and one about everyday life now as well as beyond death. Perhaps she can teach us about our call to an apostolate and show our hope can be realized in previously unimagined ways.

What is it like to bring Christ to places where he has been unknown, or even to places despised or rejected and thrown out? We bring Christ as a small seed and often have to find a way to plant it in very unwelcoming ground. At times Christ is like an arrow that causes a tiny wound which goes unnoticed but will lead to a crisis and becomes a life or death matter. But quite often the arrow misses every mark and seems to have been shot in vain.

Yet this is not an entirely helpful metaphor. What we have to do is present Christ as though he were a tiny newborn child that everyone wants to pick up and hold and hug and love. Every mother knows what that is like. But she also knows that the baby will grow up and then not everyone will respond with the same enthusiasm and tenderness.

The words and example of Christ have become our rule of life and inspiration. The result is generosity and even tenderness. To bring Christ to others is to bring them the truth, including the truth about themselves. Do you want, more than most other things, to know such truth? Don’t fear; in Jesus the truth is also love. A mother shows us this and loves even without seeking any personal benefit, except perhaps self-respect and a sense of duty done.

This warns us that an apostolate of love has to be one of discretion, prudence and patience. It is an apostolate rooted in a profound love of Jesus and a robust spiritual life based on that love. This transforms us into loving and caring and respect-filled persons much like Mary. That is what first makes the message and gift we offer welcome and even attractive. We show what faith and love of Christ does to a person and how it makes that person beautiful and good.

What was special about Mary before God called her to virgin motherhood? She loved God and sought to obey God in every moment of her living. Read history and see how filled Mary’s world was filled with violence and every sort of horrible attempt to use others to gain personal advantage. Her son has given all a new ideal that leads away from this. Whether or not individuals adopt that ideal as their own, it never goes away.

Mary stood beneath the cross and saw what makes the world so dark and so in need of her son’s message. She didn’t turn away from the call to imitate her son and so she speaks to us of forgiveness and love and invites us to a new life. She holds these ideals before us. She shows us how we can live them in a way that draws others to imitate her Son. That’s why our vocation is to bring Christ to others, and to do it in the same ways Mary does.