

Christ the King – November 25, 2007

LESSON: Getting Back to Christ

The Solemnity of Christ the King, which every Catholic throughout the entire world is celebrating today, is a **new thing**.

The Church has existed for almost 2000 years, but this Solemnity is **less than 100 years old**. It was established by Pope Pius XI in **1925**.

He explained **his reasons** for doing so in an encyclical letter called *Quas primas*.

- ? First he explained that throughout history **liturgical feasts** have been instituted in response to **particular needs** that arise in the life of the world and the Church (#22).
- ? He gives the **example** of the feasts in honor of the **martyrs**, of the celebration of **Corpus Christi** and the **Sacred Heart**.
- ? And then he explains which need this **new** celebration addresses.



- ? He was writing this encyclical in **1925**, when the world was still trying to recover from **World War I**, which had **devastated** Europe and **shattered** modernity's hopes for unlimited progress based solely on human reason.
- ? 1925 was also only a few years after the **Russian Bolshevik Revolution**, which had given birth to the world's first **explicitly atheist** totalitarian regime: **Soviet communism**.
- ? In Mexico, a revolution has brought about a government that had outlawed the Church and prohibited the practice of the Catholic faith.
- ? Everywhere the pope looked, he saw human societies **abandoning Christian values** and trying to **build paradise on earth through other means**.

But if humanity had been able to **perfect itself by itself**, without God's help, then Jesus Christ would **never have come** to earth.

- ? The fact is, Jesus **did** come.
- ? He brought his **Gospel** and his **grace** to a **fallen** race, and only by **believing** in that Gospel and **accepting** that grace can **individuals and societies** achieve true and lasting peace and prosperity.

Pope Pius XI instituted today's Solemnity as a way to remind the world that to reject Christ, either in **private** life or in **public** life, is to reject our only **hope**, and to **accept** him is to accept **salvation**.

As Pope Pius IX wrote: "...When once men recognize, **both in private and in public life**, that Christ is King, society will at last receive the great blessings of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony... That these blessings may be abundant and lasting in Christian society, it is **necessary that the kingship of our Savior should be as widely as possible recognized and understood**, and to that end nothing would serve better than the institution of a special feast in honor of the Kingship of Christ." (*Quas primas*, 19, 21)



ILLUSTRATION: My trip to Mexico

I remember very fondly my time in Mexico 2 summers ago. During our trip to Mexico City to visit Guadalupe, we also made a pilgrimage to venerate the remains of Blessed Miguel Agustín Pro – one of the Mexican martyrs of the 20th century. The blood that was shed by these martyrs for confessing their faith and practicing God's justice was not in vain. They gave their lives in defense of religious liberty, a liberty which had been denied them by the President of the Mexican Republic. "Long live Christ the King! Love live the virgin of Guadalupe!" Cries which strengthened the people of Mexico and has motivated generations to live the Gospel from their hearts.



Miguel Pro was born in 1881 in Guadalupe, Zacatecas in Mexico. From his youth, his smile and joy were important characteristics of his personality. At 20, he entered the novitiate for the Jesuits. Very soon after his entrance, the novices were forced to leave the country because of the Mexican Revolution. And so, he was ordained a priest in Belgium. But, when he thought of the great religious persecution occurring in his own country, he was allowed to return to Mexico in 1926 – just one year after the proclamation of the feast we celebrate today – of Christ the King.

Miguel Pro felt obligated to spend the rest of his life bringing Christ to his fellow countrymen. This was his special mission. He spent his time secretly attending to the needs of the Mexican Catholics, many times doing so in secret for fear of the government. Finally, the government issued a formal order for his detention, and so he was forced to go into hiding.

He was false accused of treason and was sentenced to be executed. He was turned in by a boy who was afraid that his mother will be killed. A few days after his detention, he told a friend that he had offered his life to save Mexico – and that he thought that God had received his offering.

While he was being taken to be executed, he forgave the jailor and the firing squad in front of him. Granting his last wish, he was allowed to pray and, in front of their eyes, extended his arms in the form of a cross and cried out in a loud voice: “Viva Cristo Rey!” “Long live Christ the King!” while handing over his life to his God.



APPLICATION: Renewing Our Loyalty to Christ the King

By giving us this liturgical celebration, the Church hopes that we will **not forget about** our King and his Kingdom.

- ? The Church is a **wise mother**. She knows that we have a **built in tendency to forget** about these things.
- ? The **pleasures, possibilities** and **worries** of life in this fallen world are real. They are **strong magnets** that try to **monopolize** our attention.
- ? But Christ is **stronger**. And he has **much more to offer** - eternal life, in fact, meaning, purpose, forgiveness, wisdom, and the strength of his grace.



And yet, he is not a **tyrant**. He **offers** us citizenship in his Kingdom, but he leaves us free to accept or reject that offer.

Today, let's renew our **acceptance**.

When he **proves his love** for us once again in the sacrifice of this Mass, let's **profess our love** for him.

- ? Let's invite him into our **minds**, and let him **reign** there through our **firm belief** in all of his teaching.
- ? Let's invite him into our **wills**, that part of us where we make our **decisions**, and let him **reign** there through our **loving obedience** to his **commandments** - especially the commandment to **love our neighbors** as he has loved us.
- ? Let's invite him into our **hearts**, that **secret center of our souls** where we **treasure** things, where our **affections** reside, and let him **reign** there by putting every natural desire in **second place**, behind our desire to **know, love, and follow our King**.

Today especially, before we receive our Lord in Holy Communion, let us put **more meaning than usual** into the words that sum up **every** Christian's **fundamental mission** and **deepest desire**:

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.