

Is declaring Christ the King fake news?

On the church calendar this is the last Sunday of the lectionary year. Next Sunday, as we anticipate the birth of our Lord, we begin a new year. Each Sunday is given a designation within the church year, and as noted at the top of your bulletin, the church declares this Sunday Christ the King Sunday. We go from the angel's welcoming the new born king to our declaration of his kingship. This is not one of the traditional and long held celebrations of the church. In fact, the first time this concept appeared was in 1925 when it was instituted by Pope Pius XI because of his concern about the secularization and nationalism he saw occurring in the world. It was originally celebrated in October, but was moved to the final Sunday in the church year in 1970. As both secularization and nationalization have continued to spread in the world, many Protestant denominations have included this as a part of their emphasis as a bridge between the old year and the beginning of the Advent Season, the new Church year. In fact, there are two designations for this day on the calendar: Christ the King and Reign of Christ. The question which I have asked in the sermon title has more to do with how when we look around us, we can make this declaration. How do we interpret the where and when of Christ's reign? What are the signs of Christ's reign among us? What kind of kingdom is represented where Christ reigns? Because if we don't carefully examine scripture for these answers when we declare the kingship of Christ, and if we aren't living according to what scripture tells us represents the signs of the presence of Christ's kingdom, then perhaps our declaration is fake news. At first glance the two passages from scripture before us this morning represent two pictures of Jesus; the exalted Christ and the crucified man. In the letter to the Colossians we have drawn for us an image of high Christology. These images are those of the exalted Christ. Here the author praises God because through Christ because as he writes: "He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him." This is the language and image used when Pope Pius XI first instituted what he called the Feast of Christ the King. He did so in his encyclical *Quas primas*, which although it was addressed to the Bishops was really meant impress and remind congregations, the laity, folks like us what the early church came to believe about Jesus. Specifically Pope Pius wanted to remind them what this kingship meant in terms of the here and now, in how they were to witness to that kingship. In his words: ¹"If to Christ our Lord is given all power in heaven and on earth; if all men, purchased by his precious blood, are by a new right subjected to his dominion; if this power embraces all men, it must be clear that not one of our faculties is exempt from his empire. He must reign in our minds, which should assent with perfect submission and firm belief to revealed truths to the doctrines of Christ. He must reign in our wills, which should obey the laws and precepts of God. He must reign in our hearts, which should spurn natural desires and love God above all things and cleave to him alone. He must reign in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls, or to use the words of the Apostle Paul, as instruments of justice

¹ [Pope Pius XI, *Quas primas*, §33, Libreria Editrice Vaticana](#)

unto God.” That is still the core of what it means when we declare that Christ is King. When we look at the second text, we see there a very different image. If we look at the image of Jesus there, nailed to the cross as did those people who stood by scoffing and mocking him, we see the image that the world wants to see. The world looks and does not see power but vulnerability. There had been placed an inscription above him which read “This is the King of the Jews.”, but those mocking him did not believe that it could be true. There were shouts implying that if he were the Messiah, God’s chosen one, he should be able to save himself. To one and all watching this man suffering death, that he could have the power to save others, to also then save himself and not use it...it did not make sense, so according to the world’s logic, he could not have it. That someone could have power and not use it for themselves...was not and still is not the usual way of the kingdom of this world...It is however the foundation of the reign of God and God’s way of reconciling the chasm sin created and thus redeem us. On the cross, Jesus demonstrated a power beyond that the broken world could not comprehend, a radical challenge to the structure upon which its power was and is based. In the gospel text we see bullying, mocking, derision and cruelty. The humiliation of the vulnerable, the smugness of those who think they have won through these means, and most telling the silence of the good people who don’t want to get involved. The King upon a cross. And the response of the King? “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?” This king demands a total change to the way the world’s structure treats those which are viewed without power; those who are weak; those who are “other”. This king demands that we witness and speak up to the rightness of this “new earth” not as something not possible here, but as the kingdom, his kingdom coming near because where we are, he is there also. So when we declare that Christ is King, we do so committing ourselves to the witness of his presence in our lives; to the rightness of his teachings; to the dedication of our minds, wills, and hearts to the truths revealed not just on this Sunday declared Christ the King Sunday, or on any other Sunday, but within all that we say and do, each and every day. If we do this, then the world will know the truth of the gospel: Christ is Lord. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.