

Christ King  
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

November 26, 2017  
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## Jesus is King

Once upon a time, there were five monks sitting around a rough-hewn table in the Dark Ages after the fall of the Roman Empire. They are scholarly clerics, a papal delegation to figure out yet another liturgical conundrum. We have Christ as baby, Christ as boy, Christ as preacher and healer, Christ as Sacrifice, we have Christ as Redeemer and Christ risen up into heaven, but now the Pope has asked for yet another high and holy feast. When to celebrate Christ as King? “End of October,” says one of them, and so they recommend it to the Pope.

Well, that's NOT how it really happened. Christ King was established in the Roman Catholic Church in 1925 in response to rising secularism. At that time, Pope Pius XI established it on the last Sunday in October. In 1969 Pope Paul VI changed the date to the last Sunday of the liturgical year. When the Episcopal Church adopted the Revised Common Lectionary in 2006 as an approved lectionary for worship Christ King became part of our calendar.

The date really does make sense. The Lutheran Church of Sweden called it the Sunday of Doom, until they changed it to The Return of Christ. The celebration takes its meaning from the Return of Christ at the end of time, so this feast comes at the end of the year. The liturgical year begins next Sunday on Advent 1, which is the church's New Year's Day. In Advent we read the prophecies, and we do things that prepare for the coming of God. In Christmas we party for 12 days to celebrate the birth of our Salvation. In Epiphany we seek to make Christ manifest in us. In Lent we walk with Jesus toward Jerusalem under darkening skies. In Holy Week we walk with Jesus from the Triumphal Entry to the Cross and the Tomb. The climax of the year is the Resurrection. Then we celebrate Eastertide for 10 days longer than Lent, telling stories of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost sends the Church into the world in mission, and we focus on what it means to be the Church in the world. At the end of this—the final chapter of the story, is Christ King Sunday.

Now, if this King Jesus is the final end, then his kingship also tells us about the path to the end. When I was a teen in High School I could always tell you the cardinal directions. To the west of the city of Quito, Ecuador, where I went to High School, Mt. Pichincha rises right out of the suburbs. The closest peak tops 12,000 ft., and the highest peak, on the rim of the volcano that is the mountain, tops 15,000. Even on a cloudy day, the base of the mountain is unmistakable. It dominates the western sky. Just look to the mountain and you know where west is, and from there you can look east to Mt. Antizana, north to Mt. Cayambe and south to Mt. Cotopaxi. Mt. Pichincha became my reference point in deciding what direction to take.

In the same way, the Gospel lesson today describes a great moment at the end of time when Christ the King will separate the sheep from the goats. The telling detail in the

difference between the sheep and the goats is how they treated human need. This becomes the reference point for the Christian. It is important to remember that human need does not just exist in others. We, too, are in need, and when we recognize that we, too, are needy, we can see it in others more clearly, and we know how to respond.

How shall we then live today?

Does life have you leveled? A woman came into our clinic in Honduras. She was ill, she had a diabetic lesion on her leg as big as a saucer. She was alone in life. Her only son had committed suicide the year before. Her husband had been murdered by gang members the previous year. She had no remaining family. Tears of fear and sadness ran down her face. Have your foundations shaken you, too? There is still hope, there is always hope. Share hope with the those who, like you, are hopeless, because the King of Hope is on the throne.

Does your conscience have you cornered? One year in Honduras we took a medical team into the local prison. I went as clergy. Young men admitted some sins of murder, extortion and rape. I was safe—I was a foreigner and a priest. They craved to know that even if the state did not forgive them, God did. Are you feeling condemned? There is forgiveness. There is always forgiveness. Accept and grant forgiveness to others, because the King of Forgiveness is on the throne.

Is your situation in life sad? Last year an off-duty policeman in our town shot and killed his estranged girlfriend, and then turned the gun on himself. He left behind two orphaned children, a 6-year old girl and a 13-year old boy. I and other clergy met with employees of Hidalgo Medical Center where the girlfriend had been head of nursing. For the town it was just too close to the three Aldo Leopold students who died in a small aircraft accident in 2014. Sadness hung in the air. Are you mourning? Then when you have wept enough, dry your tears. It is always right to finally dry your tears, and to dry the tears of those who mourn, for the King of Comfort is on the throne.

Are you angry at arrogance? Our nation's capital is troubled by accusations of some pretty serious misconduct on the part of a few powerful men. Brave victims of their inappropriate behavior have risked political and economic retaliation to come forward and denounce what seems to be in some corners an institutional pattern. No leader in our nation should be above the law, and no leader in our nation should be given license to demean, belittle and abuse people with less power, no matter who they are. The fact that God has created each and every one of us gives each of us a sacred center that it is a sin to violate. We work hard at Good Shepherd to make sure that this environment is one where the lion and the lamb can feed together without fear. Are you feeling driven? Then take up your banner and march. Speak truth to power. Do good in the face of evil, for the King of Justice is on the throne.

Have blessings abounded? One time after a UTO ingathering in my parish, one of the poorest members found me in the street. She apologized for not being at services, and she gave me a UTO mite-box taped together, lest it fall apart for the weight of coins in it.

You see, there had been times when she was in need, and the Church reached out to her. Grateful, she was spreading the blessings. Are you feeling grateful and happy? Are you being confirmed or received into this church today? Is one of your loved ones celebrating finding a fitting church home, and you, too, are glad with them? Are you just happy to be gathered with the people of God that is the family of Good Shepherd Church today? Then give thanks. Always give thanks, and make your gratitude more than just an attitude.

- Feed the hungry,
- Clothe the naked,
- Comfort the mourning,
- Visit the prisoners,
- Preach hope to the hopeless, and
- Liberate the captives.

There is always reason to live out gratitude, because the King of Goodness is on the throne.

What does it mean that today is Christ King Sunday? My parents were linguistic missionaries to the Tsachi people of western Ecuador. Dad translated the New Testament and portions of the Old into what previously was an unwritten language. Noble as that is, however, it was not his final goal. His reference point was the Gospel established among the Tsachila. That reference point drove not only his translation work day by day, but sent him into the homes of the Tsachila of evenings to tell Bible stories and to witness to the faith that was his. Today, there is a group of Christian Tsachila who gather weekly to worship and to learn from the Tsafiqui Bible that Dad published.

He lived, knowing that Christ King is on the throne. On earth he blessed so many people that the people insisted that my parents' ashes be buried in their own Tsachi cemetery. He is one of my heroes of the Kingdom.

Thank God for Christ, the King!