

CHRIST THE KING – B (November 22, 2009)
Fr. Jerry Kopacek

First, I want to give you an update on an item mentioned in our parish bulletin two weeks ago regarding the new format we will have for our missalette and music issue starting next Sunday. Instead of using those being two separate books, we will begin using a single edition that combines the Mass readings and prayers and music all into one volume that will be used for the whole year. All the readings for the Sunday and holy day Masses will be in this one volume as well as the Gloria, the Creed and the Eucharistic prayers. The music section comes next; it contains songs and hymns to be used throughout the entire church year. The antiphons for the weekday Masses are on the yellow pages at the end of the book. Because we will no longer have to have boxes and boxes of missalettes shipped to us many times throughout the year, the parish will enjoy a cost savings of several hundreds of dollars each year. This one volume will fit easily into the plastic covers we already have. I would ask one favor: at the end of Mass, please close the book before putting it away. I have often seen them left open in the pew racks like this [. . .]; that leads to more wear and tear on the spines of the books.

Today we find ourselves at the end of another church year as we celebrate this solemn feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King. This is the last Sunday of Ordinary Time; next week we will begin the new liturgical year with the first Sunday of Advent and thus it makes sense to begin using our new books then. Last weekend Deacon Lynch spoke about the last things, e.g. the inevitability of death and judgment, and this feast of Christ the King reminds us that, at the end time, Jesus' kingship will be established definitively and eternally at the Last Judgment. In the first reading, we heard the prophet Daniel foresee this kingship when he saw 'one like a Son of man' receive a dominion that will be everlasting and a kingship that 'shall not be destroyed.'

As we look at the world around us, it is obvious that that final and eternal kingship of Christ has not yet arrived. It will most assuredly happen, but it is not here yet and we do not know precisely when it will come. Jesus himself made it clear that his kingship was not entirely of this world. In that fascinating dialogue we heard in the gospel (and that we hear every year on Good Friday), Pontius Pilate asked Jesus repeatedly: 'are you the king of the Jews? ... Then you are a king?' In fact, there were others of that time, even some among Jesus' own disciples, who thought that he would establish an earthly kingdom for the Jewish people and throw off the hated yoke of Roman tyranny. Jesus had to remind Pilate that his kingdom is real, but that it does not belong to this world.

This was not easy for Pilate to understand, and it may not be immediately obvious to us either. When we hear the word 'king', a number of images may come to mind: a ruler sitting in authority on a throne, wearing fancy robes and a crown of gold, holding a scepter as a sign of his authority. These are the kinds of kings we learn about in our history books, at least a few of whom have been canonized as saints. Our own St. Edward, patron saint of this parish and who is depicted in one of our stained glass windows, is an example. He was the king of England in the mid-11th century (not quite a thousand years ago). He ruled wisely and was able to help resolve many conflicts without having to go to war. Edward also was a genuinely pious Christian and gave much support and assistance to the Church and her work; in fact, he came to be known as 'Edward the Confessor.'

But neither Edward nor any of the other saintly kings ever fully established the kingship of Christ in their realms—they could not do so. And that is even more true today: if anyone in public office even hints at a belief in or devotion to Jesus Christ, the ACLU and others immediately spring into action with their predictable demands for 'separation of church and state' (a phrase, by the way, that is not found anywhere in our Constitution). So what does the kingship of Christ mean for us right now, near the end of this year of 2009? Is it only something for the unknown future that has no relevance for us now? No. Again, that kingship will be fully and eternally established only at the second coming of Jesus at the end of the world.

But Jesus' first coming was the beginning of the establishment of his kingship. Jesus speaks of this in today's gospel as well when, in answer to Pilate's question ("Then you are a king?"), he says that the reason he was born and came into this world was to testify to the truth. He goes on to say that all who belong to the truth listen to his voice. So...not only has Jesus begun to establish his kingship, but his followers—we and all others who listen to and heed his voice—have a fundamental part to play in furthering that kingship of Christ.

And so there is the challenge. Is Jesus Christ truly the king in your life? I challenge you and me and every one of us to ask ourselves that question every day. And remember the kind of king we have in Jesus: not one who is tyrant or dictator, not one who enjoys seeing his subjects suffer or who doesn't care about us. Rather, Jesus is the king whose throne was the cross to which he was nailed, whose crown was made from sharp, piercing, painful thorns, and whose robes were ripped from his body, thus reopening all the wounds he received from being scourged. Jesus is the king who for our sake 'was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered, died and was buried' in the words of our Creed. All this he endured, all this he accomplished for love of us and his burning desire for our salvation.

Is Jesus Christ truly the king in your life? And not just in some vague, generic sense, but in all those details that involve a decision between right and wrong, between sin and virtue?

--is Christ our king when we decide which websites we're going to check out on the internet?

--is Christ our king when we decide how we're going to think or speak about that person who hurt us or who really gets under our skin?

--is Christ our king when we decide who faithful we are to promises made to God and others in following the vocation to which God calls us (marriage or any other)? Or to the duties and responsibilities we have at home, school, work, and church?

Jesus Christ is Lord and King of all creation, and that kingship will be established completely and eternally when he comes again in glory. That is for certain; we will all experience that kingship in its fullness when our bodies and souls are reunited for the Last Judgment. In the meantime, it is up to every single one of us to decide how we respond to the truth to which Jesus testifies—not just for an hour on Saturday night or Sunday morning in this building, but everywhere else as well. Later in this Mass is a prayer that reminds us that Christ the King will present to the Father 'an eternal and universal kingdom...of truth and life...holiness and grace...justice, love and peace.' May we live as faithful and joyful servants of this divine king in this life (and return to him if and when we stray) so that we may rejoice forever in the fullness of his heavenly kingdom.