

You Say It

The Liturgical Year concludes with the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. This observance replaces the 34th Sunday in Ordinary Time, at least by name. It's the 34th Sunday, no matter what you call it.

Commonly referred to as "Christ the King," the feast's official original name was "Our Lord Jesus Christ, King." The current name was set by Pope Paul VI in 1969.

It's a relatively new feast, having been established in 1925 by Pope Pius XI. Originally celebrated on the final Sunday of October, it moved to the final Sunday in Ordinary Time in 1970.

From the earliest days of the Church, Christ was thought of as the king and ruler of all creation. This feast also looks ahead to the end times, when the Reign of God will be established in its fullness.

So the idea that Christ deserves this title is undisputed on every front: historical, scriptural, and theological.

Why was this feast established — and why in 1925, 1900 years in round numbers since the time of Jesus? Was there some new revelation that Christ is the king of everything? No, that was recognized in the earliest centuries.

It was the times. Relativism and anti-clericalism were seen as clear and present threats to the Church and the world it is meant to serve and save. There's isn't time to properly explore relativism here. But the short version is that it's the idea that there is no absolute truth, and that there is no absolute right and wrong. The Church rejects this idea.

Anti-clericalism is opposition to religious authority, especially in social or political matters. The Catholic Church has often been a particular target of this kind of opposition. Those who remember or are aware of the 1960 presidential election saw this in action first-hand: there was a widespread fear that, if elected, JFK, a Catholic, would impose the Church's views on the entire nation.

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe makes a powerful reminder that it is Christ to whom every created thing and creature belongs — a worthy, powerful, and necessary statement.

But how do we reconcile Jesus, the king, who stands before Pilate, crowned with thorns and clothed in royal garments whose purpose was to ridicule, not affirm Him? "You say it," He says, "I am a king. But my kingdom is not of this world." (Jn 18: 37, 36)

Our King, arrested unjustly, scourged, crowned with thorns, and nailed to a cross, makes no show of earthly power — nor of heavenly power. Even taunted to save Himself, He simply endures what his Father has asked Him to endure.

This is not what anyone would expect of the "King of the Universe." Humility, service, self-sacrifice, none of it fits the typical image of a king.

But these days, we aren't really into kings and queens as monarchs governing the masses. Monarchies that remain today are mostly symbolic. Somebody gets to be king or queen just by being born to the right parents? We're so over it!

But the kingship of Christ — true service, true humility, true self-sacrifice — leads to eternal glory. That is the kind of King we have. That is the kind of King the world needs.

When that glorious day arrives when we meet Jesus face to face, we are going to see the wounds that Thomas touched. We will see the scars where the thorns pierced his head. We may have to squint because of the radiance of His glory, but we will be meeting a wounded King of the Universe.

By Baptism, we share in the roles of Christ: priest, prophet, king. Our kingship must be like His — built on service, humility, justice, and love — and quite possibly wounded. And that's the absolute truth.