

The Last Sunday after Pentecost, Year C, Christ in Majesty  
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St Paul's Episcopal Church, Key West,  
FL  
November 20, 2022  
Jeremiah 23:1-6  
Canticle 16  
Colossians 1:11-20  
Luke 23:33-43

## **Reign of Christ**

In 1925, it was clear that fascism and totalitarianism were real.

Seven years after the armistice that brought the fighting of World War I to a stop, the disputes and grievances that gave rise to that war had not been addressed much less resolved. Even though some twenty million people had died in the Great War, nothing had truly been settled.

In such a political climate and milieu, authoritarianism flourished. Many heads of state, both leaders who were elected and those who led uprisings, sought to gain and secure power by fanning the flames of fear and hatred of one people and nation and ethnic group for another.

Benito Mussolini was in power in Italy. Fascism was on the rise in Spain under a military dictatorship. Communist Russia was in transition and tilting toward totalitarianism. Economic decline and a series of rebellions brewed in Germany setting the stage for the rise of Adolf Hitler a few years later.

And in 1925, in the midst of that political climate and milieu, Pope Pius XI, as head of the Roman Catholic Church, made a bold, prophetic theological move. He declared that beginning that year, the last Sunday in October would be a new feast, the feast of Christ the King.

The message was pointed, needed, and clear: the Sovereign of those who are Christians is not their head of state or leader of government but the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, even Jesus Christ. The first allegiance of Christians in any age and every place is not to their head of state or to their country but to their Savior.

Later in the twentieth century, after some changes to the church calendar, this new feast was moved to the last Sunday in the season after Pentecost, the last Sunday in ordinary time. And there it remains on the last Sunday of the church year, which is today.

Since 1925 the Roman Catholic Church followed by many Christian communions, including ours, have observed this Sunday as the feast of Christ the King, Christ in Majesty, the Reign of Christ. It is also known as the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. On this day we remind ourselves and the world that it is the reign of Christ that inspires our loyalty and devotion above and beyond any other.

Heads of state whether they seized power or were elected or coronated do not merit our highest devotion. Nations and regions whether those we are born into or those we move to cannot command our best love. Parents and families whether by birth, marriage, adoption, or choice are not the ultimate focus of our concern.

For those of us who have been baptized into Christ's body, the Church, nothing and no one can or should be put in the place of God in Christ who is our ultimate horizon, our ground of being, our beginning and our end.

The reign of this Divine Sovereign *is* a reign of power. But it is power for and power with and power to. It is *not* power over, power to oppress, power to crush, power to annihilate. The reign of Christ as Sovereign is a realm and rule of loving service, in the name of Christ for the sake of the world that God so loves.

In 1925, Pope Pius XI created the feast of Christ the King.

The following spring, in 1926, on April 21, a Wednesday, a girl was born in London. When she was ten, her uncle stepped down from his position, and her father took his place. She became heir to the British throne. Her name was Elizabeth. Perhaps you've heard of her.

On her twenty-first birthday, in 1947, this future monarch addressed the world via radio saying, *I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong.*

In his homily at her state funeral on September 19, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby recalled her promise to the commonwealth at age twenty-one, remarking, *"Rarely has such a promise been so well kept!"*

Her late majesty Queen Elizabeth II was the longest-lived British monarch in history; she died at age 96 years and five months. She was also the longest-serving British monarch; she was the sovereign for seventy years and 214 days.

Certainly, long life and overall good health have much to commend them. But if all Queen Elizabeth had done was to live for the better part of a century and then die, I doubt most of the world would have come to a stop for her funeral.

This is not to say that she was a perfect person. Nor is it to say that many nations of the world are not still struggling to overcome the negative effects of empire and colonialism of which she and they and we are all the heirs.

But it is to say that, in her person, Queen Elizabeth II was clear on her purpose and her allegiance. And on this day when we celebrate the necessity and joy of giving our devotion to our true Sovereign, it's worth noting that she never wavered concerning who was hers.

As Archbishop Justin also noted in his funeral sermon, *"In 1953 the Queen began her Coronation with silent prayer, just there at the High Altar [in Westminster Abbey]. Her allegiance to God was given before any person gave allegiance to her. Her service to so many people in this nation, the Commonwealth, and the world, had its foundation in her following Christ – God himself – who said that he 'came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.'"* (Matthew 20:28)

Her late majesty Elizabeth II was Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England. She not only held those titles, but she was also a practitioner of the faith and an active Anglican Christian. Her faith was not pretentious, but it was genuine. It came through quite clearly in her annual Christmas addresses. On Christmas Day 2012 she said, *"This is the time of year when we remember that God sent his only son 'to serve, not to be served'. He restored love and service to the centre of our lives in the person of Jesus Christ."*

The reign of Christ as Sovereign is a realm and rule of loving service, of placing the common good, the healing of the nations, and the repair of the world before the wealth or success or profit or fame or comfort of any one person or group or faction or party or nation. We live *in* that reign of Christ. We live *for* that reign of Christ. We live *by the power of* that reign of Christ. We live *in expectation* that the reign of Christ will come in fullness in due course.

Dying you destroyed our death.

Rising you restored our life.

Christ Jesus, Sovereign of the Universe, come again in glory.