

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of Christ the King
November 24, 2019

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What do we mean when we call Christ the King? For those of us who worship Him as Lord and Saviour, our understanding begins with the concept of a benign and kindly earthly sovereign. He is the one who does good things for his subjects. But world history is full of examples of bad kings, and in the 19th and 20th centuries most monarchies disappeared. King Farouk famously observed there would remain only five kings: four in a deck of cards and the King of England! When we look back into the Old Testament, from King Saul into the end of the kingdom of Judah you can count the good kings on one hand using three fingers! Most every other ruler was a despot who strayed from the precepts of Almighty God.

So in what way do we call Christ a King? As portrayed in the Gospels His kingship is glimpsed mostly during the Passion. In Holy Week calling Jesus **king** was an *accusation*! With one notable exception, no one using that term was a follower of the Lord. It is a strange fact it was the *enemies* of Jesus in their rage who acknowledged what they could not give in homage and adoration to Christ as King.

That observation gets us close to understanding the Divine Kingship. God's will is not determined by anything we can do, either by way of promotion or opposition. The very fact we call the day of a cruel execution of an innocent man *Good Friday* recognizes this fact. The Divine King has no need of an earthly court or a standing army, much less a public relations firm full of spin masters! On Good Friday night the enemies of Christ thought they had won. But the Gospel boldly declares two days later this Man was walking the streets of Jerusalem! God's strength is *in His Mighty Arm*, and His appeal is to the souls and voice of conscience He Himself designed in every human person.

That is part of what we mean by calling Christ the King. Something else about this kingship unfolded gradually during the three-year ministry of the Lord. This aspect of Christ the King connects with what you and I know in our relationship to the Lord. Along with the invitation to intimacy with Him, there is a regal and majestic quality we know instinctively we must reverence and adore. In the Gospels we cannot help but notice a bond and affection between Jesus and His original disciples. The nicknames Our Lord gave some of them is an indication of this friendship. "Peter" means "rock-like" but Simon was very much a work in

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progress. Two brothers were called “**boanerges**” or *sons of thunder* for their hot temper. There must have been some good-natured teasing. But then there were *other* moments when this intimate friend was mysterious and regal. One stormy night on the Sea of Galilee was like that. The disciples heard Jesus rebuke the waves and wind as if He were a parent scolding children whose games had gotten out of hand! No one in the boat ever forgot that moment. Simon Peter never forgot another time when at our Lord’s instruction there was a record catch of fish. While those at the fish pier laughed at the expense of the professional fishermen, Simon Peter alone realized this Man, Who could see right down to where the fish were, can also see right into my soul. This sudden revelation of the kingly aspect of God-made-man elicited those words: “Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man.” But Peter was actually pleading for nothing of the sort! The Transfiguration was another moment when the disciples beheld the King in His glory. They said “It is good that we are here.” *But it also made them afraid.*

The Feast of Christ the King reminds of how Jesus is King. His reign and rule is expressed in terms of divine justice and self-giving. Where things we know by earthly experience might come from authority, what originates in any form of self-will most often contains a dose of self-centeredness and leads to domination and oppression. But then there is the Divine King. His authority is not derivative at all. *This king is the author.* And when we recognize Him, so secure, so loving, so ultimate, so attractive, and so genuine, our self-will sees what Peter recognized on that fishing pier in Galilee. We will surrender ourselves and choose Christ and His will. Wherever and whenever that happens *it is the reign of Christ the King.*