

The Ending Feast of the Liturgical Year

Christ the King

Introduction:

"Christ the King is a title of Jesus based on several passages of Scripture and, in general, used by all Christians. The Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations, including Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans and Methodists, celebrate, in honor of Christ under this title, the Feast of Christ the King on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, before a new year begins with the First Sunday of Advent (the earliest date of which is 27 November). The Feast of Christ the King is thus on the Sunday that falls between 20 and 26 November, inclusive". [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_the_King] A few examples of scripture are: "Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him." (Mark 15:32 KJV) "And they began to accuse him, saying , We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King." (Luke 23:2 KJV)

To start with we might keep in mind that, in our world today, the title of king is basically symbolic. There are only a few monarchs that are truly sovereign in a few countries that still refer to their head of state as king or queen. When America began, our forbearers came here to discover a new land that would give them new freedoms and opportunities without the tyranny of such rule. The American revolution eventually accomplished this and a new form of government was founded on law under the will of the people.

"In early times there was a belief in the "Divine Right of Kings." It was understood as a "doctrine in defense of monarchical absolutism, which asserted that kings derived their authority from God and could not therefore be held accountable for their actions by any earthly authority such as a parliament. Originating in Europe, the divine-right theory can be traced to the medieval conception of God's award of temporal power to the political ruler, paralleling the award of spiritual power to the church. By the 16th and 17th centuries, however, the new national monarchs were asserting their authority in matters of both church and state. King James I of England (reigned 1603–25) was the foremost exponent of the divine right of kings, but the doctrine virtually disappeared from English politics after the Glorious Revolution (1688–89). In the late 17th and the 18th centuries, kings such as Louis XIV (1643–1715) of France continued to profit from the divine-right theory, even though many of them no longer had any truly religious belief in it. The American Revolution (1775–83), the French Revolution (1789), and the Napoleonic wars deprived the doctrine of most of its remaining credibility." [<http://m.eb.com/topic/166626/divine-right-of-kings>]

As time progressed this understanding was altered by a question of how this doctrine was administered beginning in medieval times. A controversy developed between the Church and secular rulers as to its origins. "All were agreed that it came ultimately from God who alone held the right over life and death. What was at issue was the route. The papacy held that it came through God's representative, the Church and its ministers. Anti-papalists, such as Dante, maintained that power in secular matters came directly from God to the monarch, whether he be elected or hereditary. The argument was revived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the rise of absolute monarchs in France and England. In its extreme form, as stated in Basilikon Doron by King James I, it says that: (1) political power comes directly from God to a hereditary monarch; (2) that monarch has absolute power which cannot be in any way restrained; and (3) anyone who opposes the monarch in any way

is guilty of treason and liable to death, and, possibly, damnation. Filmer gave divine right a patriarchal base by attempting to ground it on the authority God gave to Adam, as the father of the human race.

The doctrine was opposed by the Jesuits—Bellarmine and Suarez in particular. It was brutally set aside in England by Cromwell and in France by the Republic in 1792-3. In England it was revived by Charles II but died with the Glorious Revolution of 1688. — Cyril Barrett. [<http://www.answers.com/topic/divine-right-of-kings>]

What may this Feast mean today?

What kind of king do we see in Jesus? Was he to be or was he ever a ruler king by Divine right? Apart from a few scriptures that use the title king what do many other words about him and his words and actions suggest to us?

To begin with, let us consider the birth narratives. They all seem to suggest a very modest and humble beginning. Of the four gospels only Matthew and Luke contain stories of the birth of Jesus. Matthew tells us that Mary and Joseph were only betrothed but Joseph is assured, quoting the prophet Isaiah, that the child would be "Emmanuel", meaning God with us and so they named him Jesus. Matthew then tells of the visit of the Magi who, by the leading of a star where they found him in a home in Bethlehem and knelt down to worship him and bring him gifts. He concludes his narrative by reporting the flight into Egypt, Herod's massacre of the babies, and the return of Joseph and Mary to Egypt. Luke, at greater length and detail, begins with the birth of John the Baptist, including the Annunciation by the Angel to Mary, Mary's visit to John's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, and the birth of Jesus in a manger in Bethlehem. In this very humble scene he does include the singing of an angelic multitude along with the visit of local shepherds. Their stories pose the idea of a king in their narratives but emphasize the presence of God in the life of the newborn Jesus.

His life was also a testament to simplicity as best we know. The Synoptic Gospels are the primary source of such knowledge and the details of his daily lifestyle are sparse. They speak of no lavish existential possessions or habits that might portray anything but simplicity. *"Jesus calls some Jewish men to be his Twelve Apostles. None of them seems to have been a peasant (an agricultural worker). At least four are described as fishermen and another as a tax collector. Jesus speaks of the demands of discipleship, telling a rich man to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. He states that his message divides family members against each other. Luke places a special emphasis on the women who followed Jesus, such as Mary Magdalene. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus speaks primarily about the Kingdom of God (or heaven). In Matthew and Luke, he speaks further about morality and prayer. His moral teachings in Matthew and Luke encourage unconditional self-sacrificing God-like love for God and for all people. During his sermons, he preached about service and humility, the forgiveness of sin, faith, turning the other cheek, love for one's enemies as well as friends, and the need to follow the spirit of the law in addition to the letter."* [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus>] Except for the large crowds he was said to attract by his preaching, there seems to be nothing to suggest anything but humility and simplicity.

During the final days, when he entered Jerusalem for the last time, we see clearly his humility when he enters on the back of a borrowed donkey. While our religious tradition often refers to this as his "triumphal entry" into the city, during the celebration we begin to see a humble and tragic end. There are many examples during these closing scenes that in no way reflect a king in the traditions of humanity. We begin to see what a king is like in the Realm of God, that kingdom that Jesus told us he

was here to proclaim. His preparation is in prayer and communication in the solitude of a garden and away from the crowds. Jesus speaks about the realities and the clear distinctions of God's realm and the brutality of the kingdoms of this world. When he visits the Temple his actions point out the poverty of their worship showing their attention to temporal matters and not on the eternal values that count most for a good life. After this the Gospel of Mark tells us stories about the Fig Tree, the questioning of authority, the parable of the tenants in the vineyard, questions about taxes, and life after death. Before Mark moves toward the final events before the crucifixion, we read about the Great Commandment, Jesus warning the teachers of the Law, the widows offering, the discourse on the destruction of the Temple, and the horror that comes from the neglect of the eternal values that are a part of God's Realm.

During the Passover Meal that Jesus shares with his disciples he makes it clear that living their lives according to God's Realm on earth is no easy task. They will need to be nourished in the table fellowship that only God can provide for their sustenance. They cannot betray eternal principles by the use of physical violence as portrayed by the story of Peter cutting off one of the ears of a guard when they came for Jesus to take him away. They will need to stand firm and strong against the human judgements that stand against the peaceful authority of the creator of all that is. While you may be threatened by these temporal judgements with physical death, be aware that they cannot destroy the eternal life you have with all creation. We will be raised and transformed by the authority of the Creator's design like that of energy and matter, which are equal and fused with the speed of light squared, and cannot be destroyed but only transformed. Often, in Scripture, we are told that "God is Light" and in the theories of Science we may be just beginning to understand what all of this might mean?

The Feast of Christ the King, to me, has a whole new and comprehensive meaning as we end this Liturgical Year. As we move into this 21st century let us move forward in our interpretations to reflect our knowledge and understanding of our world today. The doctrine of absolute sovereignty no longer exists in most of our developed nations. Where the title of king or queen is still used almost none of them has absolute power and authority. Most nations are governed by laws that even the leadership is supposed to follow. This is why the dictionary defines a dictator, who attempts to rule sovereignly, as *"a ruler who is unconstrained by law or a person who behaves in a tyrannical manner"*. Even our understanding of God's sovereignty, if that term is still used, is one primarily of love that calls us to respond in love to a righteousness with universal principles. These principles seemed to be shared by almost all faiths, especially those which celebrate and honor that Light that is an integral part of the universal equation of Relativity.

The Feast of Christ the King is a grand celebration and reminder of the wholeness of God's Realm. It brings together the eternal and the temporal as two aspects of the same. Our trend toward dualism has the tendency to separate and divide that which is whole. This celebration is a reminder of the relativity of the eternal and the temporal in the essence of life. The eternal and temporal are as equal as are energy and matter are equal. Christ the King is our Christian symbol and reminder of the mystery of the Light that enables the whole equation to be. The simple and yet profound seen in the vision of the burning bush from which the voice declared, "I Am", the verb to be! Just as the seven days of creation depict the mystery of the origin of a Universe of time and space, so the seven seasons of our liturgical year speak of the mysteries of life in the majesty of the Realm of God. The following are brief paragraphs to review these seven seasons of our Liturgical Year.

In **Advent** - we are asked to awaken and watch for that which is coming. A new cycle with new beginnings reminiscent of the Big Bang, the singularity, that began the creation as we know it. Almost every religious tradition has something like the beginning of our yearly liturgical calendar called Advent. It is a time of renewal to call all of us forth to wake up and smell the coffee as I explain in my article on Advent. [Read the article on Advent - <http://janddhealth.intuitwebsites.com/LYAdvent.pdf>]

We are invited again to use all of our senses and human intelligence to continue anew in ways that inspire and bring forth new things. While looking at progress from our past and dreaming about new possibilities for the future we are encouraged to use our productivity in the now to move forward in another year. Learning To Live Well is another series I wrote about such progress for living when anyone realizes these opportunities and awakens to probabilities, possibilities, and productivity in living well year after year. [Read the article on Probabilities in the "Learning to Live Well" section]

I believe most agree that the main theme of **Christmas** is the great love of God for the whole world and how Jesus came to be the living word to announce and demonstrate this greatest of gifts – LOVE. Religious and non-religious people alike seem to talk about love and losing our affections for material things that more often diminish our humanity, especially in these lean economic times. Let us not become jealous because this extravagant love of God belongs to all of us, everywhere, at all times, and in all places. Is this not, my friends, the essence of the story of Christmas? The humble yet dramatic awareness of God's love for our living together in this world; the wise and the foolish, the prominent and the poor, the people near and far, the angels above and the animals below are never separated from this love of God now and forever. [Read the article on Christmas - <http://janddhealth.intuitwebsites.com/LYChristmas2009.pdf>]

The term **Epiphany** means "to show" or "to make known" or even "to reveal." In Western churches, we recall the coming of the wise men bringing gifts to visit the Christ child, who by so doing "reveal" Jesus to the world as Lord and King. In the season of Epiphany we might try to learn about God and ourselves as the people of God. The Scriptures themselves give us clues of helpful ways to expand acquisition and knowledge. One of the Psalms is rather clear, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard."* [Psalm 19] How grateful we can be for all of today's science like Astronomy, Math, Physics, Chemistry, and many more. Religion, especially in the past, has often been very slow and resistant to accept these modern stories, learned from research, as accepted truth. [Read the article on Epiphany - <http://janddhealth.intuitwebsites.com/LYEpiphany.pdf>]

Just maybe, if we really think about it, **Lent** is the very tradition we need more than anything else if we are to survive in this 21st Century. Often I have heard leaders tell us, "If you do not come apart – you will come apart". Everyone is familiar with "R & R" (Rest and Relaxation). It seems that most people work more than one job and take very little, if any, time for themselves. With the present economy we hear that many individuals and families, especially those who are out of work, do not have enough money to take a vacation. Is it surprising that people's worlds are falling apart? Many people may have to start over or to at least renew whom they are in order to continue and move forward. A season of Lent may be helpful to many. [Read the article on Lent - <http://janddhealth.intuitwebsites.com/LYLent.pdf>]

Not only do secular myths and practices dilute **Easter**, "the Feast of Resurrection", like other Christian holidays, but it can also be weakened by a misinterpretation of this illustrious Feast. The

popular misconception of this primary announcement is resuscitation, coming back from the dead, rather than resurrection, being raised to a new life. This is a very important distinction if we are to get the full and complete picture of this far-reaching declaration in our personal lives. Easter is more than just a day in the life of Jesus or for an occasion in our lives after we have physically died. Easter is an experience that we can have multiple times throughout all the days of our life on this earth. [Read the article on Easter - <http://janddhealth.intuitwebsites.com/LYEaster.pdf>]

Pentecost can represent a lot of varied ideas and celebrations for religious communities and individuals. Briefly, we have seen that it was a sacred time in our Jewish and Apostolic roots. For the Hebrews it was gratitude for the provisions of food and physical nourishment. For the Apostles, it was a unique awareness and coming of the presence of the Spirit of God. In Jewish custom it also became a time to include gratitude for the giving of the Law through Moses and the early church expanded it from one day to a whole season following Easter. In both cases these were primary days of celebration for acknowledging God's gifts for the people of God. [Read the article on Pentecost - <http://janddhealth.intuitwebsites.com/LYPentecost.pdf>]

As we close each Liturgical Year as followers of Jesus with the Feast of **Christ the King** let us consider how we might live out this celebration in our daily lives. Having considered the style of the kingship of Jesus as a humble and prayerful servant we might remember these words of Jesus in John's Gospel, *"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."* (John 14:12 NIV) In the Christian scriptures of Peter and Paul we also have these words, *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* (2 Peter 2:9 NIV) *"Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."* (Romans 8:17 NIV) In the closing book of the Christian testament of scripture these two verses stand out to suggest our partnership in the Realm of God, *"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."* (Revelation 5:10 NIV) - *"and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen."* (Revelation 1:6 NIV)

What then are we doing with our lives to bring this Realm of God into our world now? We have come a long way in human history and yet there is so much more to be done. The resources of our earth are abundant, but not everyone shares equally. As a kingdom of priests, so to speak, are we fulfilling our calling appropriately so that the generosity of our earthly realm is properly disbursed? There are so many stories in our cultures and sacred myths that clearly admonish us to care and share. For Christians it is very clear, in the life and teachings of Jesus the Christ, as to the way we must live. Teaching about faithfulness Jesus said, *"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."* (Luke 12:48 NIV) If the doctrine of the divine right of kings is dead in our understanding today why replace it with another false doctrine regarding the wealthy? Since we acknowledge that we brought nothing into this world and know that we cannot take anything out of this world, why pretend that we are not equal in living? Whether we have been given much or have been entrusted with much - received or acquired it - our mission is clear.

What we need to be doing together in our world is also clear. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight international development goals that all 192 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015. They include

eradicating extreme poverty, reducing child mortality rates, fighting disease epidemics such as AIDS, and developing a global partnership for development. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennium_Development_Goals]

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

How will all this ever come to pass? None of the above, along with many other hopes and dreams we may have for our future well being, will ever be accomplished without everyone's cooperation and participation. The majority of our world wants peace and prosperity that will only become possible if we are people of PEACE - **P**eople **E**nergizing **A**lternatives **C**ausing **E**quality! We the people can bring this vision of God's Realm to a reality as soon as we actively energize our responsibilities and faithfully serve in this world as a "kingdom of priests". Utilizing our time, talent, and treasure we can insure this vision becomes a reality.

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ, and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.