

# Sunday Homily

## OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

21 NOVEMBER 2021

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II

“Jesus... made us a line of kings,  
priests to serve his God and Father.”

### Illustration

There is a mid-fourteenth-century English poem called *The Pearl* in which a man's only daughter dies before she is two years old. He wanders about in the garden where she is buried, unable to control his grief. Then he has a vision where he sees a river, and, beyond it, a beautiful flowery garden in which a young woman is seated. This is his daughter, now grown to maturity. She chides him for missing her, for she is enjoying the delights of heaven. She explains that she is now a heavenly queen. “How can that be?” he asks. The Virgin Mary, she explains, is the Queen of courtesy, while she is queen by the courtesy of God, like all the blessed in heaven: all are kings and queens.

This idea is reflected in one of the traditions of the Orthodox Church. In their weddings, the bride and groom have crowns, or *stefana*, held above their heads, signifying the glory and honour with which God crowns them. In another example, at the end of the Narnia Chronicles by C.S. Lewis, generally recognised as Christian allegory, the central characters, the children, are given crowns.

### Gospel Teaching

The image of the king and monarchy is a powerful one. In biblical times, monarchs in the countries around Israel were held to represent gods on earth, or at least to be intermediaries between the people and their gods. Many, such as the Pharaohs in Egypt, were despotic tyrants. God wanted the chosen people to govern themselves differently and, in the Old Testament, we see that God was at first reluctant to let the Israelite people have kings. However, they were allowed first Saul, and after him David, then Solomon. Following Solomon, the country divided, and kingship began to diminish in importance until it was eventually replaced. Temple priests and the people as a whole became the intermediaries, inheriting the promises God had made to the kings. The hope was kept alive, however, that one day a priestly king would arise who could lead his people back to the true faith in God.

Christ was recognised by his faithful as that special king, but human categories are never enough to describe the workings of God. What Christ inaugurated was no simple earthly monarchy, but the messianic age itself. This age, this kingdom, will one day be fully and completely brought about by Christ's second coming. Often during Mass we make the acclamation “Christ has died” – using the past

tense as an event in history; “Christ is risen” – as an ever-present event; and “Christ will come again” – a hope for the future. But it is not an entirely future experience. Because Christ came into the world, as a baby in Bethlehem, and because he rose from death at the first Easter, that kingdom is a reality in our world, and elements of it are discernible even now. All truth, all genuine love and all sincere compassion are signs of that kingdom in the here and now. This feast today, on the last Sunday in the Church’s year, is a bridge between the two greatest celebrations in the calendar – Easter and Christmas – drawing them together with a reminder of Christ the King, bringer-in of the kingdom where all will be given crowns.

## Application

The first reading today describes the people in the kingdom as being servants of God. The second, like the medieval poem, depicts them as kings. But there is really no difference between the two images. The servant-king is the most apt description of Christ, the “first fruits” of all who enter the kingdom. To be a servant-king is what inspires the Christian life. What are the characteristics of a servant-king? Well, in the play *Macbeth*, Shakespeare makes a list of qualities of kingship, or “king-becoming graces” as he calls them: “justice, verity, temperance, stableness, bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness, devotion, patience, courage, fortitude”. Quite a standard to live up to – but nothing that should be beyond the capacity of each and every Christian who aspires to wear the heavenly crown.

This sort of kingship helps to describe how our dominion, or kingly rule, is to be exercised over creation. We are told at the beginning of Genesis that we have been given dominion, or kingly rule, over all other creatures. To be tyrants like Pharaoh? No. To be servants, like Christ. This is the challenge with which we are presented. The kingdom of which Christ is king seeks only the genuine happiness of others.