



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION FOR THE FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 23 November 1997

1. On this Sunday which closes the liturgical year, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. In the Gospel we listened to Pontius Pilate's question to Jesus: "Are you the King of the Jews?" (Jn 18:33). Jesus replies by asking in turn: "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" (Jn 18:34). And Pilate answers: "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?" (Jn 18:35).

At this point in the dialogue, Christ states: "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world" (Jn 18:36).

Everything is clear and transparent now. Faced with the priests' accusation, Jesus reveals that his is another kind of kingship, a divine and spiritual kingship. Pilate asks for confirmation: "So you are a king?" (Jn 18:37). At this point, excluding every erroneous interpretation of his royal dignity, Jesus indicates his true kingship: "I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice" (Jn 18:37).

He is not a king as the representatives of the Sanhedrin understood it: he does not, in fact, aspire to any political power in Israel. On the contrary, his kingdom goes well beyond the borders of Palestine. *Everyone who is of the truth hears his voice* (cf. Jn 18:37) and recognizes him as king. This is *the universal scope of Christ's kingdom* and its spiritual dimension.

2. "*Bear witness to the truth*" (Jn 18:37). The reading from the Book of Revelation says that Jesus Christ is "the faithful witness" (1:5). He is the faithful witness because he reveals the mystery of

God and announces his kingdom, which is now present. He is the first Servant of this kingdom. By becoming "obedient unto death, even death on the cross" (Phil 2:8), he will witness to the Father's power over creation and over the world. And the place for exercising his kingship is the Cross he embraces on Golgotha. His was a shameful death, but it represents a confirmation of the Gospel proclamation of the kingdom of God. In the eyes of his enemies, that death should have been proof that all he had said and done was false: "He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him" (Mt 27:42). He did not come down from the cross but, like the Good Shepherd, he gave his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:11). The confirmation of his royal power, however, came a little later when on the third day he rose from the dead, revealing himself as "the first-born of the dead" (Rv 1:5).

He, the obedient Servant, is King because he has "the keys of death and Hades" (Rv 1:18). And, because he is the conqueror of death, hell and Satan, he is "the ruler of kings on earth" (Rv 1:5). In fact, everything on earth is subject to death. Instead, he who has power over death opens the prospect of immortal life to all humanity. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the fulfilment of all creation (cf. Rv 1:8), so that every generation can repeat: Blessed is his kingdom that is coming (cf. Mk 11:10).

3. Dear brothers and sisters of Holy Trinity Parish in Castel di Lunghezza, I am pleased to be here with you today to celebrate the Eucharist on the Solemnity of Christ the King.

I affectionately greet everyone here, with a cordial thought for the Cardinal Vicar, for the Vicegerent and for your parish priest, Fr Bruno Sarto. I also greet the Monfort Missionaries with their seminarians, the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux and all those who, in various ways, help with the guidance and pastoral service of your community. Lastly, I greet all of you, dear parishioners, extending a particularly affectionate word to the elderly, the sick and those who are alone.

I wish to assure all the inhabitants of this area, located on the edge of the municipality of Rome, that, even if they are physically distant from the Pope's house, you are always close to me. Your suburb, which arose like so many others without precise planning, unfortunately still lacks many structures and especially social services for the elderly, young people and children. Here again the parish is the sole centre for coming together and it makes an essential contribution to the social life of the entire neighbourhood. I therefore encourage the Diocese of Rome to continue in its praiseworthy effort to provide suitable parish structures in those areas where not only places of worship, but the other services also are lacking. In this regard, I wish to take this occasion to urge you and all Roman citizens to generously support the project "*50 Churches for Rome 2000*", which is meant to provide every district of Rome with a church.

4. I am aware that in this area the spiritual children of St Vincent de Paul have carried out a laudable work of evangelization, especially through popular missions. To them go my appreciation

and my heartfelt acknowledgement of their generous pastoral zeal. These missions are still needed today not only in the Roman countryside but throughout the city of Rome. They must be organized in a renewed form, which expresses the real situation of the People of God as a "people-in-mission". This is precisely what the Diocese is endeavouring to accomplish with the *City Mission*.

Next Sunday, as I open the year dedicated to the Holy Spirit in preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I will give crosses to the men and women missionaries who in the coming months will visit families and proclaim the Gospel in the homes of this and of every Roman parish.

Dear catechists, dear members of the parish council, dear members of the various groups, I wish to extend a special invitation to each of you: generously continue your work of evangelization, even if at times it may be difficult and unrewarding for you! The Lord is with you and he will never abandon his Church.

I urge you, dear families, not to be afraid to live a demanding love that is marked, as the Apostle Paul writes, by patience, kindness and hope (cf. 1 Cor 13:4,7).

To you, dear young people, I wish to repeat that the Church needs you, and I would like to add: you need the Church, because the Church desires only that you meet Jesus, the One who makes man free to love and serve.

The Church needs you because, after having experienced the true freedom that Christ alone can offer you, you will be able to witness to the Gospel among your peers, with courage, with great creativity, using the sensitivity and talents characteristic of your youth. May the *Youth Mission*, within the *great City Mission*, foster this reconciliation between young people and Christ, between young people and the Church!

5. Dear brothers and sisters, today's liturgy reminds us that the truth about Christ the King is the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. The prophet Daniel announces the coming of the Son of man, who has been given "dominion and glory and kingdom". He comes served by "peoples, nations and languages" and his "dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (cf. Dn 7:14). We know well that all this was perfectly fulfilled in Christ, in his Passover of Death and Resurrection.

The Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe, invites us to repeat with faith the prayer of the Our Father, which Jesus himself taught us: "Thy kingdom come".

Thy kingdom come, O Lord! — "A kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace" (*Preface*).

Amen!

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