

24 November 2024 - Feast of Christ, King of the Universe, year "B"

[Dan 7:13-14; Rev 1:5-8; Jn 18:33-37](#)

Homily

In 1925, still at the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Pius XI instituted the Feast of Christ, King of the Universe, in an effort to combat the forces of destruction at work in the world, which he identified with the rise of atheism and secularization. Since then, Christians have celebrated Christ under this title every year, but that did not stop the great nations of Europe that considered themselves Christian from waging a murderous war against each other a few years later. This feast, which we celebrate in our turn, should be an opportunity for us to focus on the message that Jesus left us even more than on the ever inadequate titles and concepts that people have attributed to Him down the ages.

Towards the end of Jesus' life, as he was going up to Jerusalem where he would be put to death, and even though he had already announced his death three times, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, James and John, intervened with Jesus to ask that her sons be given prominent places in his cabinet when he became king. This was the occasion for Jesus to make this recommendation to them: *'The rulers of the Gentiles have them under their power and the great ones under their domination. It must not be so among you. On the contrary, if anyone wishes to be great among you, let him be your servant'*. (Mt 20:25-26).

If we wanted to free today's feast from the historical context - rather defensive and polemical - in which it was instituted and give it a title closer to the spirit of the New Testament, we could call it the *'Feast of Christ, the Universal Servant'*.

In his dialogue with Pilate, recounted in the passage from John's Gospel that we have just read, Jesus finds himself in a situation that would be comical if it were not so tragic. On the one hand, he finds himself before a paranoid king who wonders if he is not facing an opponent who could dethrone him, and on the other, he finds himself before the religious authorities of his people who do not recognize any authority in him but who, in order to have him put to death, claim that he wanted to proclaim himself king.

Jesus places himself admirably above all these political calculations, even though he knows full well that it is these political calculations that will get him put to death, and he repeats the same lesson that he had given to the sons of Zebedee, to their mother, and to all the disciples: his authority is of a completely different order.

' I was born and came into the world ', he says. Jesus does not see himself as an authority above the world. He is *' in the world '*. His Father so loved the world that he sent his Son. And the Son so loved the world that he became incarnate in it and became the servant of all. In the same way, he sent his disciples *into the world* to be like yeast in the dough, or salt in the earth. *It is not Christian* to hate, despise or condemn the world. The only Christian attitude towards the world is one of service, which in some cases may involve service to the point of death.

Jesus came, he tells us, *' to bear witness to the truth '*. He does not say that he came to teach the truth, still less to impose it. He came simply to bear witness to it. And what attitude towards the truth does he expect of his disciples? He said: **'Everyone who belongs to the truth hears my voice'**.

We do not and cannot possess the truth. It is the truth that possesses us, and all we have to do is accept that we belong to it. It is always dangerous and often catastrophic to think we possess the truth. History shows us abundantly that every time the Church wanted to make alliances with the powerful of this world to propagate the truth it thought it *'owned'*, the results were dramatic. The Crusades were not evangelising adventures. Nor will it be the cohorts of *' new evangelizers '* setting out on a campaign to conquer the world that will bring about the ever-new evangelization that the world needs today, as it has always needed. What Jesus is looking for are people who humbly acknowledge that they belong to the truth and *allow themselves to be possessed* by it.

These, Jesus says, are the ones who **hear his voice**.

Let us listen, brothers and sisters, to the voice of the one who calls us to humbly serve one another and all our brothers and sisters in humanity. It is through this service that faith will spread like fire through the world of which we are a part, warming and purifying it.

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