

A Different Kind of Power: A Shepherd King

When we think about kingship and power, we carry a certain image—and it's often unhelpful for understanding how God exercises His power. Today's Gospel shows a very different kind of power. The Church clearly chose this passage as a juxtaposition, to make us rethink: what does power look like?

If we define power as getting my way, furthering my agenda, or getting my viewpoint heard, we'll miss how Jesus exercises power. Jesus is a shepherd king, as our first reading alludes. A true shepherd uses power gently—wooing, guiding, leading us in the right direction. That is how God deals with us: gently shepherding us toward life and abundance. Not a shepherd who beats His sheep, but One who wants life in green pastures.

Why the Feast Still Matters

The feast of Christ the King is exactly 100 years old. It was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925, in response to several geopolitical and moral factors that threatened a right understanding of power and human flourishing. He identified three forces—still present in our culture—that the feast was meant to counter.

First, state atheism. In 1917 Russia established atheism as official policy. Around the same time, Mexico—one of the most Catholic countries in the world—also instituted atheism as state policy. When a state adopts atheism, it must suppress religion and the clergy. Where worship is made illegal, persecution follows, and society suffers deeply.

Second, rising political ideologies in Europe after World War I. The bishops saw intense, warring party movements gaining ground—consider the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich just two years before 1925. While not outlawing Christianity, many of these ideologies insisted that anything resembling Christian values be expelled from politics.

Third, a postwar drift into moral relativism: “You do what you do, I do what I do.” With no objective moral grounding, people push God out of their lives and attempt to become their own arbiter of right and wrong.

In all three cases—God removed from the nation, from politics, and from personal life—the Holy Father insisted: Jesus is Lord of everything. This is not a call for theocracy; rather, whatever political system you have, Jesus is Lord of it. Only when Jesus is at the center will the human heart find peace, harmony, and flourishing.

Why Christ Is King—and How to Live Under His Lordship

Some will say, “That’s fine for Christians, but not for me.” The feast answers with its theological core: in what way is Jesus King not only of the Church, or of Christians, but of the universe?

Jesus is not given kingship as a title after the Resurrection and Ascension. He is King from the moment of His Incarnation in the womb of Mary. Why? Because He is God and took on flesh—He assumed a human nature, the crown of creation. As the Incarnate Son who entered creation, He is King of the universe by virtue of His conception and Incarnation. We see His kingship exalted after the Resurrection, but He is already King in a humble way in Mary’s womb. He is the Alpha and the Omega; all time and space converge in Him. Human flourishing takes its cue from Jesus and His Sacred Heart. Even if one is not Christian, Jesus remains the only hope of every human heart and the only source of salvation.

Why, then, do political systems—and even individual hearts—try to push Jesus out, at least from certain areas? Often, it is fear. We fear that God’s power conflicts with our freedom. It does not. Today’s Gospel reveals what the power of God is: life. The Author of life brings life—peace, rootedness, healing, and a deeper fullness of life. St. Paul says this life comes as redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. Many saints have said that the conversion of one sinner is a greater work than the creation of the world (a point attributed most clearly to St. Bernard of Clairvaux): creation, though wondrous, is simple compared to the messy work of redeeming and wooing the human heart.

His power is gentle. His power brings life. His power deepens our conversion. His power never violates our freedom; it does not force us to do what we do not choose. It invites us into greater life.

Here is a practical takeaway for the week. Set aside about ten minutes to journal—not only fears about your walk with the Lord, but every fear you can name. Natural fears (like snakes) have their place. Most of what we fear, however, we are not meant to fear, because Jesus is Lord and He is with us. List your fears. If a fear is outside your control, surrender it to the Lord—place it in His gentle hands. If a fear is within your control, ask: on a scale of 1–10, how big is this? Thoughtfully and prayerfully, cut that rating in half and entrust it to Him. God’s perfect love casts out fear.

Dear friends in Christ, as we celebrate the Eucharist and receive our King in Holy Communion, let us ask Him to help us make Him Lord of our lives as never before. Let us ask Him to cast out fear so that we may live in freedom and peace.

Praise be Jesus Christ.