

**SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE KING - CYCLE C**  
**Sacred Heart-Griffin High School, Springfield, Illinois**  
**Thanksgiving Mass**  
**November 20, 2010**

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**Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

He was known as the “Flying Scotsman” and he was the projected winner of the men's 100 meters race at the 1924 Summer Olympics. But when Eric Liddell discovered that the trial runs were scheduled for a Sunday morning, he bowed out of the race. Even the Prince of Wales could not persuade him to honor his country by running on the Sabbath. Liddell explained his decision, saying, “God my King is greater than the kings of England, Wales and Scotland. To honor God is more important than to honor the king of England.”

Because he was a missionary as well as a talented athlete, Eric Liddell had a keen awareness of God’s primary importance in our lives. He observed that “God makes kings, and the rules by which they govern. And those rules say that the Sabbath is His. And I for one intend to keep it that way.” As we celebrate the solemnity of Christ the King today, we ask ourselves: How does the way I live reveal that the Son of God rules me? How might others guess that Christ is my King?

Christ reigns over us by the power of truth and the rule of love. You and I would not be here today to celebrate the Eucharist if Jesus were not the ruler of our lives. We recognize the truth of his presence among us. We know him in the breaking of the bread, in the word of God, and in the fellowship of those around us.

While worldly leaders may impose harsh or unjust laws, Christ rules through love alone. Those of us who belong to him avoid lording it over others, setting ourselves up as judges, or failing to respect the royalty of every person as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

When Eric Liddell ran in his second-best event, he ran with a paper crumpled in his hand. It read, "Those who honor me I will honor" (1 Sm 2:30). And he set a new world's record. If we remain faithful to Christ, we will win a much more important race and live in his eternal kingdom.

Christ expects us to follow him in testifying to the truth. Pontius Pilate might have tried harder to avoid imposing the death sentence if Jesus had not made it known that he was a king whose rule far surpassed anything the Roman procurator had imagined. But Jesus would not deny the truth of his identity. The truth of our identity as Christians is that we are members of "a royal priesthood," a people who belong to God (1 Pt

1:9). We are called to testify to the truth about unjust systems and worldly powers that fail to honor the human dignity of every person.

Eric Liddell served as a missionary in China because he was driven to share the joy of honoring God. We evangelize others every time we decide that honoring God is more important than pleasing ourselves. Christ has made us a kingdom of priests to serve our God. By his life of self-giving and his death of self-sacrifice, Jesus reveals what it means to be a true priest and a true son or daughter of the Most High God.

We show that we belong to royalty when we, like Christ the King, lift up the poor, welcome the sinner, forgive an enemy, confront injustice, comfort the sick, guide the children, respect the aged, and praise our God with all that we are.

As a marathon runner, one of my favorite movies is *Chariots of Fire*, which tells the story of Eric Liddell. In the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, Eric Liddell speaks the most memorable line. It is also an inspiring line, so I have it taped next to my bathroom mirror to inspire me when I look at it. Eric Liddell tells his sister, "I believe that God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. When I run, I feel God's pleasure." We feel that same pleasure when we fulfill the purpose for which God made us.

My dear brothers and sisters, recently the United States held mid-term elections. On every election night, or soon after, we witness two personal appearances. The loser sadly concedes loss; the winner triumphantly announces victory. Few of us would trade places with the loser. We would gladly stand with the winner.

Today's feast of Christ the King presents us with a winner and an apparent loser. The tribes of Israel gather around David and his followers after he has finally won the kingship. Jesus on the cross is mocked and tormented, flanked by two crooks also hanging from their crosses. If we look carefully, with eyes of faith, we realize that Jesus, the apparent loser, is more victorious than His ancestor David. We should feel privileged to stand with Him.

Throughout this year we have listened each Sunday to passages from St Luke's Gospel. In the first chapter of that Gospel, Mary is told that God "will give [to her son] the throne of his ancestor David" and that "his reign will have no end." Today, in almost the last chapter of his Gospel, Luke paints a moving scene of Jesus on the cross. At last he's being hailed as a king, but the acknowledgement is a piece of empty mockery. Even the inscription above his head, "This is the King of the Jews", is perhaps

nothing more than Pilate's cynical way of saying: this is what happens to anyone in my domain who pretends to be a king.

Jesus is subjected to the abuse and the jeering of the crowd, as they yell, "If you really are a king, "save yourself, come down from that cross." In the midst of this heckling, a single courageous voice is raised in Jesus' defense. Incredibly, it comes from one of the men who is suffering a similar fate: he is hanging from a cross. Humbly, he admits that he is getting what he has deserved; but "this man," he insists, "has done nothing wrong." And then, perhaps straining to look towards Jesus, he makes the wonderful appeal: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." True royalty shines out in the reply he receives; it's the message of a king going to his coronation: "I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Our Lord is a king like no other: on Calvary he's reduced to powerlessness, with a wooden cross as his throne, a circle of thorns as his crown, a jeering mob as his courtiers. But Paul, reflecting on this scene, sees the glorious truth that lies beyond, the truth that the "good thief" had glimpsed. In today's second reading Paul explains that Jesus is king by double right. First, as our creator: in Christ, says Paul, "were created all things in heaven and on earth"; and also as our savior - "by his death on

the cross," we have been reconciled with God. Both the creating and the reconciling are without explanation, except as wondrous gifts of God's love.

On this Solemnity of Christ the King, the Sunday before our national holiday of Thanksgiving Day, we gather to give thanks to God in this Eucharist for all the gifts showered upon the community of Sacred Heart-Griffin High School. In this Mass, as the gifts are brought to the altar, we are bringing our lives, our hopes, our problems, and ourselves as humble offerings to the Lord; at the consecration, we shall bow in adoration before our Lord and God; at Holy Communion, we are invited to a private audience with the King of kings. And when Mass is over, we shall be sent forth in the name of the King of kings, called upon to translate into action what we have celebrated. Through baptism we are royal sharers in a royal dignity as the children of God. Our task, this week and every week, is to live lives that in some measure reflect the unselfish love of Jesus, the servant king who came not to be served but to serve; who served even to death on a cross, and who now reigns forever and ever in His heavenly kingdom, to which He invites us all if we but follow Him.

May God give us this grace. Amen.