

Homily for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe - Cycle A
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
November 22, 2020
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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

Reverend Father, Deacons, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

I am currently reading a fascinating book called, *Crown and Country: The Kings and Queens of England*, written by David Starkey. It was given to me last year by Father Chris House when we went to England for the lectures I delivered at the University of Oxford. While it is captivating reading, it is not the type of book you can read in one sitting, not only because it is 500 pages long, but also because it takes a while to digest the details of the many characters, battles, political machinations, rivalries, romances, and royal intrigues.

Indeed, *Crown and Country* tells the tale of all the Kings and Queens of England, starting with its roots as the Roman province of *Britannia* following the first expeditions of Britain by Julius Caesar in 55 B.C. St. Bede the Venerable wrote an early history of the conquest of Britain by the Angles and the Saxons, who came from the Germanic nations of Anglia and Saxony in the middle of the Fifth Century.

From the early Christian kings, the history of the kings and queens of England recounts the monarchies of the Houses of Goodwin and Wessex; Normandy, Anjou and the Plantagenets; the Houses of York, Lancaster and Tudor; the Stuarts and the Hanoverians, including the present-day House of Windsor.

Intertwined with the history of the English monarchy is its relationship with the Church, moving from its close connection to the Catholic Church, to its break with Rome when Henry VIII declared himself Supreme Head of the Church of England, the persecution and martyrdom of Catholic martyrs such as Ss. Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher, its struggles with Protestant Puritanism, to the present day reality of the Church of England.

Covering a span of over two thousand years, *Crown and Country* can spend only a few pages on even the most significant kings and queens of England, but cumulatively, it tells a story of saints and sinners, virtues and vices, fidelity to the true faith, as well as apostasy, heresy and schism.

In a sense, though, because there is such a large cast of characters being described, what I found most striking is how kings and queens come and go, but the life of the country goes on. Indeed, in our own country, we see presidents, governors, senators, mayors and other leaders come and go.

Now, you may be thinking: yes, that's true; these earthly rulers come and go, but so do bishops, priests and religious. If that is what you are thinking, you have captured my point perfectly! We all come and go. Saint Paul wrote that there are only three things that last: faith, hope, and love, and "the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). Saint John wrote that "God is love" and that "God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him" (1 John 4:8-9).

Today the Church ends the liturgical year with this Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. The only King who will not pass away is Jesus Christ, and His Kingdom will last forever.

Three years ago, on the Solemnity of Christ the King, we concluded our Fourth Diocesan Synod. The fourth Declaration of our Fourth Diocesan Synod declared, "To be a disciple means to accept Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior. Disciples are those who 'make a conscious, firm decision, carried out in action, to be followers of Jesus Christ no matter the cost to themselves.'¹ Catholic discipleship refers to a committed approach to living a Christian life within the Catholic Church."

Today's scripture readings tell us that Jesus is a very different kind of King. The prophet Ezekiel foretells that God will come as a shepherd who

“will judge between one sheep and another” (Ez 34:11-12, 15-17). Psalm 23 says, “The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.” Saint Matthew tells us that this prophecy has been fulfilled in Jesus, who tells His disciples, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Mt 25:31-46).

How does Christ the King judge us worthy of His Kingdom? He uses the corporal works of mercy as criteria. In our world today, COVID-19 has magnified the need for these corporal works of mercy. Let’s consider a few:

a) *Visiting the imprisoned.* Folks in nursing homes have been necessarily physically distanced from family and friends. Many people have found creative ways to stay connected. Some offer Zoom, Facetime, or other online video chats. Others have window visits and patio visits. Phone calls and cards are always helpful. We should reach out any way we can.

b) *Feed the hungry, shelter the homeless.* Statistics vary, but most show that bills pile up for 70% of us after one missed check. For many folks, jobs lost due to COVID-19 will never return. No income means no money to pay

rent and utilities. Moratoriums on evictions cannot last forever, raising the number of homeless.

c) The challenge is to follow the Gospel mandate: feed the hungry, shelter the homeless – and the other people identified in today’s Gospel.

The reward for doing so, according to our King, is eternal life.

In the very last line of the Apostles’ Creed, we profess our belief in “life everlasting.” St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that is “fitting that the end of all our desires, namely eternal life, coincides with the words at the end of the creed, ‘Life everlasting. Amen.’ The first point about eternal life is that man is united with God. . . . Next it consists in perfect praise, according to the words of the prophet: Joy and happiness will be found in it, thanksgiving and words of praise. It also consists in the complete satisfaction of desire, for there the blessed will be given more than they wanted or hoped for. The reason is that in this life no one can fulfill his longing, nor can any creature satisfy man’s desire. Only God satisfies, he infinitely exceeds all other pleasures. That is why man can rest in nothing but God. As Augustine says: *You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our heart can find no rest until it rests in you.*”²

As we receive Christ our King today in Holy Communion, may we determine to be Christ's healing presence for others, using our gifts as disciples of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, 1992.

² From a conference by Saint Thomas Aquinas, priest; quoted in the *Liturgy of the Hours*, Office of Readings for Saturday of the Thirty-Third Week in Ordinary Time (*Coll. super Credo in Deum: Opuscula theologica* 2, Taurini 1954, pp. 216-7).