

Sermon for 21 November 2010
Christ the King Sunday

+In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Even we Americans, who treasure the ideals of democracy, tend to have a fascination with royalty. With the recent news of Prince William's engagement to Kate Middleton this week, has ignited once again our apparent respect of, or at least interest in, a form of government which is not our own. My father, himself by no means a royalist, even sent me a text message, half-seriously to see if my own passing acquaintanceship with the future king some years ago would give the family an "in" to receive a wedding invitation. (The answer, by the way, is "no".)

Why do we find royalty so charming—even appealing—in a land founded on the apparent contradiction between modernity and monarchy? Perhaps the perceived ineffectualness of our

democratic system, with its nastiness and gridlock which have been all the more striking in recent years, makes us secretly long for something less subject to the passing though passionate sentiments of voters and politicians. Perhaps the appeal of tradition and an admittedly rose-tinted, romantic misperception of "the good old days", which in truth weren't all that good, can make us long for that which connects us to that mythic past. Perhaps it's the aesthetic appeal of lords and ladies in their finery and sovereigns in their courts and all the rest of it.

Or, perhaps it's because we know we're not really selfless enough to govern ourselves. Let's take the conversation away from the commonwealth for a moment and consider the individual. It takes a saint to govern his own appetites and petty desires, to look to the good of another rather than his own. Now magnify that individual flaw and what one sees is a commonwealth of basically sinful,

selfish people paying lip-service to the merits of interdependence and mutual responsibility. Unless you're Ayn Rand or Gordon Gekko, you can see how this is not tenable.

The problem is, absolutism of a certain kind is no better than a democracy fraught with controversy. You can have a good King Edward the Confessor or a bad King Edward II. You can have a righteous King Josiah or a wicked King Ahab. Human frailty, man's penchant for greed and the pursuit of power, is a constant whatever form a nation's constitution takes.

The problem is that the authority which rulers wield, whether that ruler's title is King or President, is ultimately human authority. In the end our sinful nature forces us to muddle through, governing ourselves knowing that we'll never do so perfectly.

And in the midst of this reality we celebrate today the Solemnity of Christ the King. You see,

the only authority free from the failings of human rulers, be they kings or presidents, is the authority of God Himself as we have known Him in Christ Jesus.

But this authority takes a remarkably odd form. You don't see in this morning's Gospel the pomp and ceremony of the royal wedding which will take place at Westminster next year. You don't see lords and ladies in their finery and sovereigns in their courts and all the rest of it. Rather we see our King reigning from the tree, from the Cross which was the implement of his own execution. You don't see a glorious bejeweled crown on our sovereign's head, but a battered wooden sign: "*This is the king of the Jews.*" You don't see visiting dignitaries in the court approaching the king's throne, but a criminal being hanged, pleading for mercy.

In this image of apparent utter despondency is the hope of the nations. We plead to our earthly rulers to bring us peace, but Paul tells us that

the King makes peace "by the blood of his cross."
We look to the leaders of the nations to bring us prosperity, but the Prophet Jeremiah tells us there "will [rise] up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."

This is not to say that we ought not expect much from our leaders, but it is to say that there is room in the Kingdom of God for only one King, and his sovereign right was claimed neither by royal lineage nor by popular election, but by suffering and death. We can wish for sound government, we should pray for it, but our deepest hope for justice and peace cannot be found in the hands of earthly kings and earthly kingdoms, in nation-states or legislatures or even democratic ideals. Peace and justice in their fullest realizations can only be found in the Kingdom which is not yet come, but which is very near.

We are, as Christians, dual citizens, but our first allegiance is to *that* Kingdom and *its* sovereign. Let us pray that that Kingdom will come swiftly, that our King will return to save his people, and that his rule might be acknowledged by all people. This is our hope, and it shall not be in vain.

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Amen.