

THE KIND OF KING THIS CHRIST IS

Christ the King

November 23, 2025

Today is the last Sunday of our liturgical year. A year that began with Advent, and today culminates with Christ the King. We end each year with a focus on one of the central themes of our faith, Jesus Christ as King. We see this theme repeated throughout the New Testament. In the Gospels, even the pagan Roman governor Pilate, during his interrogation of Jesus before his death, stated: "So, you are a king!" To which Jesus replied: "You say that I am a king. For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world." Our divine king is sovereign, not over a city state or country, but over all of world and all of creation, and all of time and space, and all of reality beyond time and space. Jesus Christ is the ultimate and final and eternal king. This king, this eternal Son of God and Word of God is gathered together with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the eternal trinity. We speak of this eternal sovereignty as three in one and one in three, and speak of this divinity using words like omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent.

In Jesus, the Palestinian Jew who walked this earth, we saw the purest image of what God looks like; how God acts, where God's passions lie, and what God most highly values. In our sanctuary we see the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ depicted prominently as Christus Rex, Latin for Christ the King. This image holds a prominent position, because the kingdom of God, and Christ as king, is at the very core of our Christian faith. Our king, presented in front of you, wears the robes of a prophet and priest, with a regal crown on his head. As king, you might expect to see behind him the clouds of heaven depicted, or maybe the cherubim and seraphim in flight behind him, or the myriads of white-robed martyrs prostrate behind the image of Christ our King. But none of those images are seen.

And as our Revised Common Lectionary gives us a Gospel reading for Christ the King Sunday, we might expect the passage to focus on Christ's magnificent reign as he sits enthroned in glory and majesty. But that is not

the passage for today's gospel reading. We see none of the images that we might expect of a king, on this day; no clouds, no Cherubim, no white robed martyrs, no king, regal on his throne. These images are not presented to us. Why, because along with our divine king being understood as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, our king is also known in the deepest core of God's being as love. And it is that word, love, that is at the heart of God. And love is the ultimate energetic driving force behind all that God is. In speaking of God as all loving, we do not speak in the sense that love is one of God's many glorious attributes. No, love is not one of the attributes, or traits, or qualities that God possesses. God IS love. God's very essence is love. So, if you were ever to look upon God, what you would see, would be compassionate beautiful fierce glorious strong all-pervasive love.

And because God's very being is love in its ultimate perfection, Christ the King that is displayed in front of you, and that is read about in today's gospel, is unlike anything our world would expect when speaking of a king. To the world, today's images are shocking and maybe somewhat disturbing. For, the central depiction revealed behind the image of our king, is not of the clouds of heaven or the cherubim and seraphim or the white robed martyrs, but a cruel profane shameful instrument of torture, a Roman cross. And our King stands there in all his glory, with the still visible marks of his execution, the wounds in his hands and feet. And the gospel reading we heard, was not of our reigning sovereign king being coronated on a throne in heaven, but of the crucifixion of Jesus. The death of the king.

Let's take a look at the gospel reading. The first thing that I want to point out as a side note, is that there is one sentence in most of our Bible translations that is either bracketed, or has an asterisk after it. And this verse in the gospel of Luke is not found in any of the other gospels. The footnote attached to this verse says: "This sentence is not included in many ancient important manuscripts." So, what is this sentence? It might surprise you, because it is the first of the seven words Jesus spoke from the cross. It is this, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Luke includes this sentence because it agrees with the heart of who Jesus

was, and it fits with the theme of Luke's gospel. It is a true statement of the reach of God's forgiveness, even though it may not have been spoken by Jesus from the cross.

The gospel begins with these words: "When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross." The gospel writer depicts that painful and shameful cruelty of that scene. Jesus' executioners, after having stripped him of his clothes and impaled him to the cross, now casually sit greedily at his feet gambling for who will get his clothes. And the Jewish leaders standing there, taunt and deride Jesus, saying: "He saved others, let him save himself if he is really God's Messiah, the Chosen One." Even one of the criminals impaled next to Jesus joins in the ridicule. And then we hear the soldiers mocking him: "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" Now, if all of this was not physically and emotionally painful enough for Jesus to endure, he had to also face the grief and shame of being hung naked in front of his beloved mother; to watch her profound sorrow and loss. Then as a final mocking gesture, a sign was posted above his head, reading: "This is the king of the Jews."

Down through the millennia of recorded time, our God has endured a great weight of suffering and ridicule and shame at the hands of all humanity. God's name has been repeatedly defamed and maligned. And yes, on that day on the cross, we saw the ultimate example of the suffering of God. Why would this king; why would our king endure all of this? As the Son of God, why would our king Jesus Christ endure all this? Because of what lies at the core of God's very being, LOVE; compassionate beautiful fierce glorious strong all-pervasive love.

Because God is love, God's presence in eternity beyond all time and space; and God's presence within all time and space, has always been a journey FOR others. It has been a journey of not upward mobility, but of downward mobility. Jesus once said: "The son of man has nowhere to lay his head." His path was not one of getting ahead or claiming his throne, but of taking up the towel and basin and cross. This is what it means to be Christ the King.

The Book of Philippians states this well: “Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

Philippians says: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” In other words, Christ’s path of self-emptying is meant to be our path as well. The Bible tells us that we are sons of God. We are heirs of Christ. We too are not meant to claim our rights, but to give up our rights, because of love.