

Rev. Daren J. Zehnle
St. Anthony of Padua Parish, Effingham, Illinois
19/20 November 2005

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King (A)

Every king carries with him certain symbols of his authority and of his office: the crown, the scepter and the orb, and the royal cloak. Christ the King is no different from earthly kings in this respect; he also wears a crown and robes and he holds in his hands a scepter and an orb.

To this day, the coronation ritual has changed very little over the centuries; kings are made today much as they were fifteen hundred years ago. The ritual consists of four parts:

1. the entry of the Sovereign
2. the formal recognition of the Sovereign
3. the investiture of the Sovereign, and
4. the enthronement of the Sovereign.

This being the case then, how is Jesus our King?

The entry of the Sovereign occurs when the one to be anointed King enters into the church. Jesus Christ entered the church of Creation when "he leaps to his feet and abandons the glory of heaven, in order to go in search of the sheep and pursue it, all the way to the cross" (Pope Benedict XVI, Inaugural Homily, 24 April 2005). Being born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem Jesus entered into our world and lived among us. Of this magnificent birth, St. Clare of Assisi exclaims, "O marvelous humility, O astonishing poverty! The King of the

angels, the Lord of heaven and earth, is laid in a manger!" (The Fourth Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague, 20-21).

But this is not the only time that Jesus comes to us. He enters into us when the Scriptures are proclaimed and when we read them. He enters into us, also, in the celebration of the Sacraments, most especially when we receive his sacred Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist.

The second aspect of the coronation ceremony is the formal recognition of the Sovereign by the people. Jesus, too, was recognized in this way. The Magi came from the East and inquired, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage" (Matthew 2:2). The shepherds, too, went to pay homage to the newborn king saying, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us" (Luke 2:15). When also recognize Jesus as our King when we genuflect and kneel before both in the tabernacle and upon the altar.

The birth of Jesus, though, was not the only time that he was acclaimed as King. At the beginning of Holy Week when he entered into Jerusalem for the Passover celebrations, he was welcomed with the shouts of the people, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest" (Luke 19:38). We make this proclamation at every Mass when we join in the hymn of the choirs of heaven.

Another aspect of the recognition is the anointing of the Sovereign as King. Jesus was anointed on several occasions. When Jesus was eating in the house of a Pharisee, "a woman came with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, costly genuine spikenard. She broke the alabaster jar and poured it on his head" (Mark 14:3-4). Every King is anointed on the crown of the head. The morning after the Resurrection, "Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices so that they might go and anoint [the body of Jesus]" (Mark 16:1).

The third part of the coronation ritual is the Investiture with the royal robes. It is here that the Sovereign is given the robes - the royal purple that today is more red than purple - as well as the insignia of his office and the crown. St. Anthony of Padua said of the royal robes of Jesus,

The swaddling clothes are his garment... At Nazareth he was crowned with flesh as with a diadem; at Bethlehem he was wrapped in swaddling clothes as his purple. These were the first insignia of his reign (Palm Sunday, 8).

But Jesus was clothed another time by Herod at the same time he was given his crown. "Then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged. And the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and placed it on his head, and clothed him in a purple cloak, and they came to him and said, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'" (John 19:2-3). The soldiers did not know him whom they mocked even though they addressed him rightly.

Next the Sovereign is given the insignia of his office: the orb and the scepter. The orb represents the new King's dominion over the earth and while the dominion of earthly kings is only fleeting and temporal, the dominion of Jesus Christ is eternal and without end. He is the only true King of all the earth and this we proclaim whenever we pray the Creed. It is Jesus "whose hand holds the depths of the earth; who owns the tops of the mountains. The sea and dry land belong to God, who made them, formed them by his hand" (Psalm 95:4-5).

But what of Jesus' scepter? Says St. Anthony of Padua,

In his Passion he was stripped by them of his garments, and pierced with nails. There his kingdom was completely fulfilled, for after crown and purple he lacked only a scepter; and this he took when he went out, bearing his cross, to the place called Calvary (Palm Sunday, 8).

It is, then, on the cross that Christ most fully becomes our King, for on the cross he wears the royal purple, bears his crown, carries the weight of the world on his shoulders, and holds his scepter in both of hands. What a glorious scepter that saved us from sin and death!

But there is still the fourth part of the coronation ritual: the enthronement when the Sovereign receives the homage of his subjects. In one sense, Jesus has a number of thrones. His first throne being Blessed Mary, then the manger, then the lap of Joseph, then the wood of the cross. After the ascension Jesus sits now at the right hand of God the Father. His throne

now is in heaven, but it is also here on earth when Jesus takes his throne upon the altar in the hands of the priest.

As we come before Our Lord Jesus Christ the King, let us approach him in humility to offer him homage and to listen to his will for our lives. Let us offer ourselves to him who has given us himself. Let us listen to his will and follow his commands, and as St. Francis of Assisi urges us,

"Let every creature
 in heaven, on earth,
 in the sea and in the depths,
 give praise,
 glory, honor, and blessing
 to Him
 Who suffered so much for us,
 Who has given so many good things,
 and [Who] will [continue to] do so for the future.
 For He is our power and strength,
 He Who alone is good
 [Who] is most high,
 [Who is] all-powerful, admirable, [and] glorious;
 [Who] alone is holy, praiseworthy, and blessed
 throughout endless ages. Amen."

(The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 61-62).