

## The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe: The People of Christ the King

Today's first reading is taken from the Book of Daniel. If you haven't read this book, you should. It is full of great stories all showing how God cares for his people when the world is crashing down upon them, when they are alone, when they are weak. These stories are set during the Babylonian captivity of 588 to 528 BC, but they were really written around the year 165 BC. The Hebrew people were suffering horribly during that time. The Syrians had occupied Judah and Jerusalem. The Syrian King, Antiochus Epiphanes, tried to eliminate Judaism and killed or persecuted those who refused to give up Jewish practices and accept the pagan practices of the Greek world. Many of the Hebrews joined the pagans willingly. The pagans were modern. They believed and getting drunk. They held orgies. They even made up gods to justify their actions.

Times change but people don't. There are many people in our society who live like pagans and mock those who refuse to join them. Consider your situation in school or in business. You are mocked by the immoral people around you for not joining them. Sadly, some of those people are your former friends, maybe even members of your family. They tell you that you need to be like them, need to sacrifice your faith and morals like they have.

Times have changed but people haven't. So in *Daniel* we read how Daniel and his three companions, Shadrach, Meshech and Abadnego, were brought into the service of King Nebuchadnezzar and were given food from the King's table to eat. They wouldn't eat it since it consists in pork and other foods prohibited by Jewish law. They eat only vegetables and become healthier and wiser than all the other young men who were being trained to be royal counselors. Stop gloating, all you vegetarians. The point was not that it's better to be a vegetarian, the point is that God rewarded them for their fidelity.

God's reward was seen in Daniel's wisdom when he was called upon to tell the dream the King kept having and interpret it. Daniel also intervened in the case of Susanna who was being unjustly accused by two dirty old men. One of my favorite stories from *Daniel* is in chapter 5 when a new King, Belshazzar, defiled the Jewish sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem during a feast. Something, by the way, that the Syrians did in fact do. In the story in *Daniel* the King gives a huge feast to celebrate his victories over the Hebrew people and to mock them and their God. He serves wine and pork in the Temple Vessels. Suddenly, a huge hand appears from the wrist up. It writes on the wall of the banquet room, *Mene, Tekel and Peres*. My favorite part of the story is right here. It says that the King's face turned white, his thoughts terrified him, his hip joints shook and his knees knocked. No one could understand what was written, until Daniel appeared and told the King that God had put an end to the number of days of his Kingdom, *Mene*. He had weighed the King in the scales of justice and found him wanting, *Tekel*. And he had given his Kingdom to the Persians, *Peres*. By the way, this is where we get the expression, "he saw the writing on the wall." The first part of *Daniel* also tells about his three friends being saved from the fire, Daniel being saved from the lion's den, and many other stories written to encourage the people who were suffering for remaining faithful to God.

Choosing Christ means that we also will be persecuted by those who make war against all that is holy. Choosing Christ means feeling, at times, that we are very much alone. So, you make up your mind that you are not going to get drunk, take drugs, have sex, etc. And you get mocked by those who do. And you feel alone. "I'm the only virgin in the school," the Teen cries. Well, no, you are not, but you are among those who respect himself or herself, respect others, respect God and His gifts, and are committed to live for Him. Still you feel very much alone, like the faithful Hebrews persecuted in *Daniel*.

Daniel had a vision during the night, a dream, where thrones are set up before the Ancient of Days. One like a Son of Man comes on the Clouds of Heaven and is presented before the Ancient One. This one is a human, but not a human. He is spiritual, yet like a Son of Man. This one will set the world back on to God's course. He is given dominion, glory and kingship.

Jesus Christ is our King. The writing is on the wall. The people around us, the ones who don't care if they steal from us, bully us, or destroy our reputations they will have to answer to God. The writing is on the wall. So often these people are the most popular in school, at work or in the neighborhood. Or at least the most feared. Sometimes you might ask yourself, "Why are they so mean? Why do they hurt other people, and particularly go after people who try to be good?" The answer is that they fight against the spiritual in their own lives. They can't stand others who are have the courage to do what they are too weak to do. They can't stand us for sacrificing ourselves for the spiritual, for the Lord. They may seem to be powerful. But the writing is on the wall. God will protect His people. God will protect us. And the those who mock us today, will wish they had been like us tomorrow. God doesn't give up on them either. Perhaps, tomorrow, they will hear His continual call, and decide to become like us.

Jesus Christ calls us into His Kingdom. He calls us to do battle against all that wishes to destroy the spiritual, in our own lives as well as in our world. That means getting rid of that stuff that kills us be it alcohol or some other drug, porn or some other pagan practice and so forth. The true members of Christ's Kingdom are called, like Daniel and his companions, to fidelity. This fidelity is not just a matter of faithfulness to doctrine, or even faithfulness to others, it is a matter of faithfulness to the spiritual. To be true members of the Kingdom of Christ we have to put our spiritual lives before our material desires. If we are going to break this plague of lies that is destroying our world, we have to commit ourselves to the spiritual.

Jesus said to Pilate in today's Gospel, "My Kingdom does not belong to this world." We must commit to the Kingdom. This is the challenge of our lives. It is also the most difficult challenge we will ever face. It is the most difficult task for any of us to undertake because we are engulfed by the glorification of the material and the destruction of the spiritual. We have to be realistic and recognize our weakness. If we are going to commit to the spiritual, we need Divine Help.

This is the reason why Jesus came. This is the reason why he suffered and died for us. He came to give us the capacity for the spiritual. He died to unite his life, his spiritual life, to those who accept him, not just through baptism, but through the deep

commitment to his new way of life.

The Solemnity of Christ the King celebrates the transformation of the world from material to spiritual. As the last Sunday of the Church year, it returns us to the basic reason for our worship: the Kingdom of Christ must prevail. The spiritual reign must be evident in our lives. We must continue his presence. We must be the people of Christ the King.