

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We've come to the end of another church year and to a Sunday with the rather pedestrian and uninspiring name "The Last Sunday of the Church Year." In days past, this Sunday was called "Christ the King" Sunday, and seems appropriate for today given the Epistle's mention of "*the kingdom of [God's] beloved Son,*" the mocking references in the Gospel to Jesus as "*the Christ*" and "*the King of the Jews,*" and the criminal's request to be remembered when Jesus entered His βασιλεία, most often translated "*kingdom,*" but Dr. Voelz like to translate it "rule and reign" so that we're not thinking of it in terms of place but of His kingly rule.

We also prayed today: "Lord Jesus Christ, You *reign* among us by the preaching of Your cross. Forgive Your people their offenses that we, being *governed* by Your bountiful goodness, may enter at last into Your eternal paradise" (LSB, Collect for Proper 29).

Truly, Christians have a king, our aversion in the United States to royalty notwithstanding. We have a king, Christ the King. Having ascended into heaven, and seated at the Father's right hand, Christ lives and *reigns* "with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever," as we pray.

This kingly Jesus is depicted here at Zion in the southern windows of our chancel. Those of you on the pulpit side sitting south of the columns won't be able to see the window, but there stands Jesus crowned in glory, ruling with a scepter in His right hand and an orb with a cross on top in His left, depicting Jesus as the sovereign of the world, the "*King, the LORD*" judging "*the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity*" (Ps. 98:6, 9). This is the portrait we paint of kings, in splendor, glorious and majestic. "*Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle*" (Ps. 24:8).

How different is the portrait of our King painted in our Gospel! That king is also our King. That king is depicted in another of our chancel windows, this one on the north side, with a decidedly unkingly appearance, with a different kind of crown and a different kind of scepter. For before our King could ascend to His heavenly throne, He had to experience a kingship of humiliation, hidden in incarnation and virgin birth — "*the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*" ... "*How will this be, since I am a virgin?*" (Luke 1:32-34); it was hidden in obscurity — "*Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose*" (Matt. 2:2). His kingship was hidden in poverty — "*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head*" (Luke 9:58); it was hidden in servanthood — "*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve*" (Mark 10:45). His kingship was hidden in

lowliness — *“Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey”* (Matt. 21:5); it was hidden in spite and shame — *“And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ and struck him with their hands”* (John 19:2-3). His kingship was hidden in rejection — *“Behold your King,”* Pilate said, but the Jews replied, *“Crucify him. ... We have no king but Caesar”* (John 19:14-15); it was hidden in the foolishness of the cross, the righteous One hidden among the unrighteous — *“they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left”* (Luke 23:33). Jesus’ kingship was hidden in death — *“‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last”* (Luke 23:46).

Yes, Jesus came without *“form or majesty that we should look at him,”* and with *“no beauty that we should desire him”* (Isa. 53:2). Yet it is by this Kingly appearance that our salvation truly was accomplished. In this way was our redemption won; in this way came *“the forgiveness of our sins.”* In this way were we *“delivered ... from the domain of darkness and transferred ... to the kingdom of [God’s] beloved Son.”*

This is what Kings are to do. They are to defend their people, protect them, serve them. Royal life is not the Hallmark Channel’s fairy tale depiction of the handsome prince sweeping the beautiful commoner off her feet and, duty be damned, living a carefree “happily ever after.” No! Royal life is not a carefree life of being served. Kings and queens have duties; princes and princesses have duties; dukes and duchesses have duties. Consider the British royal family. Though their role now is mainly ceremonial and symbolic, they still have many duties that they must perform as they represent the nation.

How much more is it true of our King. He came with a duty; it wasn’t *“to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:45). Jesus came as Christ the King, to be our Savior, to suffer and be crucified for us sinners. He came to bear on His body our sins, to triumph over them by His death, to nail them to the cross. He came to be smitten, stricken, afflicted, pierced, crushed for us (Isa. 53:4-5). He came *“to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.”* He came forgiving the world by His sacrifice, *“making peace by the blood of his cross.”*

Our King would not be deterred from this duty: neither by the mockery of the Jewish rulers: *“He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!”* — that is, if He is king; nor by the mockery of the soldiers who offered Jesus *“sour wine and [sneered at Him], ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’”*; neither by Pilate who had *“an inscription [put] over him, ‘This is*

*the King of the Jews.*””; nor by the criminal who “*railed at [Jesus], saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’*”

Of course, our King could have saved Himself, but that would have diverted Him from His duty, as He said, “*If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world*” (John 18:36). And so, Jesus did not fight His accusers, His oppressors, His executioners. “*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; ... like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth*” (Isa. 53:7). Or as St. Peter recounts, “*When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly*” (1 Pet. 2:23). And when the other criminal, who recognized Him as King, called out, “*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,*” Jesus reassured Him: “*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise,*” even as He reassures us still: “*I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also*” (John 14:3).

Dear saints, we’re about to sing: “the Head that once was crowned with thorns Is crowned with glory now” (LSB532:1). Our King had to pass through suffering and death to be exalted to the Father’s right hand. He rules there now in glory in His everlasting kingdom. But our King will come again as the “*ruler of kings*” (Rev. 1:5), as “*King of Kings and Lord of Lords*” (Rev. 19:16). And when He does, the Father, who at His Son’s first coming redeemed us and forgave us and delivered us out of the domain of darkness, will also, at His Son’s second coming, welcome us into Christ’s everlasting kingdom, and we will experience not just paradise, but resurrection and life. This is our Christian consolation; this is our Christian hope. As again we will sing, “The cross He bore is life and health, Though shame and death to Him: His people’s hope, His people’s wealth, Their everlasting theme” (LSB532:6).

Therefore, until that day when our victory is realized and we see Jesus coming again on the clouds, let us faithfully gather before our King for the preaching of His cross and the partaking of His body and blood. And let us go about doing our duty as royal priests, proclaiming the excellencies of Christ and loving others after the manner of our King (1 Pet. 2:9).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.