

When I was in high school, we'd often go to my friend's uncle's Domino's franchise, not to buy pizza, but just to hang out as we waited for my friend's shift of work to end. It was about this time of year, the election results had come in, and all of us were getting used to the fact that the elected president was going to be in office for four years.

One of my other friends was reflecting on the state of the world: the economy, politics, and even Biblical prophecies from Revelation and he was getting pretty distraught—perhaps about as distraught as you'd expect from a teenager who didn't have to pay rent or taxes. When I asked him, “Do you really think it's that bad?” He sat down on the bench and concluded, “1. (oops!) I don't see how things could get much worse.”

And maybe some of us are gathered here might think the same thing. I wrote this sermon before the November election, but I can predict that no matter the election result, there's about half of the nation who worries about what the next four years with the elected president will mean for them. The wars in Ukraine and Israel still continue on with no sign of things letting up anytime soon. The economy seems pretty touch and go. It doesn't seem like the culture is getting any more receptive to Christianity. To think of a teenager concluding in the late 2000s “I don't see how things could get much worse.” Would seem almost comical given today's society.

I am trying a bit of liturgical innovation this Sunday. By liturgical innovation, I mean a church festival that has been instituted only in 1925 rather than something that has been followed since the 1500s. Whereas we normally observe the Last Sunday in the Church Year, which focuses on the end of the world, this year we are observing Christ the King Sunday which is observed in place of the Last Sunday of the Church Year and was established in the 1920s.

In the 1920s Pope Pius XI sat down and said to himself, “I don't see how things could get much worse.” The roaring twenties brought about moral decay that former generations had not known. In 1922, the Soviet Union formed with its leaders effectively declaring 15% of the Earth's landmass as a no religion zone. The world was still reeling from World War I, the War to End all Wars, which had killed or injured 2%

of the global population. Pope Pius XI would live to see the rise of Hitler, but died months before Germany invaded Poland and started a war that would ultimately kill or injure 3% of the world population.

Pope Pius XI instituted the observance of Christ the King Sunday to proclaim that despite newspaper headlines, Christ is still king. Yet our Gospel reading appointed for this Sunday is perhaps not what you'd expect. Perhaps you'd expect the Ascension of Jesus or the resurrection of Christ. Maybe even the Epiphany readings where the Magi give gifts fit for a king and Herod subsequently freaking out at news of the birth of a king who wasn't him.

Instead, we have Jesus standing before Pilate, about to be crucified. We read, **“So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?””** If you read closely, Jesus never outright proclaims to Pilate that He is a king. However, He proclaims, **“My kingdom is not of this world. 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.”** Jesus has a kingdom, but it's not of this world.

Take a step back and realize the context. If you're Peter or one of the disciples, you're likely pretty distraught. I could imagine Peter saying, “I don't see how things could get much worse.”

Think about it. The man they followed around for three years just got arrested. They left their former lives and livelihoods to follow Jesus. One of the fellow disciples betrayed Jesus. And just verses earlier three times Peter denies knowing Jesus. 2. (ugh!) Each successive generation wonders how things could get worse.

Choose any event you want in the history of the world: the wars in Ukraine or Israel, a horrible ruler tyrannizing a country, a world war killing millions, or a breakdown in society leading to broken promises and broken families. These pale in comparison to the gravity of the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is true God Himself, 3. (aha!) It doesn't get worse than crucifying the king of glory. But EVEN FROM THE CROSS, JESUS REIGNS AS KING.

In the catastrophe that was Jesus' arrest, trial, suffering, and death, the Lord was still able accomplish His mission. His mission was not to

set up a worldly kingdom. His mission wasn't to create world peace at the tip of a sword. Jesus said, **“For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.”**

It was from the cross that Jesus was to bear witness to the truth. It was in His suffering on the cross that the mission was ultimately accomplished: to forgive the world of their sins. He established peace not at the tip of the sword, but He established peace between us and God through paying the penalty that our sins rightly deserved.

In the upside-down nature of Christianity, the cross became the throne of our king as He wore a crown of thorns and the sign above His head read, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. This is the King we worship. This is the Christ who is worthy of our praise.

And it is through this lens of the cross that we view all of history. Christ reigns as king precisely when things seem to be at their worst. He is still king even when the Bolsheviks take over Russia. He is still king even in the Roaring Twenties. He is still king even today with wars, moral decadence, and national politics.

How can this be? Is this not like asserting the sky is green when it is in reality blue? Yet Jesus reminds us, **“Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”** We know this is true because Jesus is the truth, and we listen to His voice. Even if you don't see how things could get much worse, you trust that Christ has a plan, even in the chaos. You trust that Christ is the truth even if everyone is lying. You trust that through His Church, He is establishing an oasis in the desert, a fortress in a battlefield, and a harbor in the storm.

As you consider your own personal struggles, conflict in your family, illness, death, or sin struggles, you know that Jesus is still King, even if He is not a worldly ruler. Earthly politicians will disappoint you. Worldly hopes will never satisfy, only Jesus can satisfy in this world of changes and chances. Thus, 4. (whee!) Even in our crosses, Jesus reigns as king.

But we also know the rest of the story. Because Jesus died on the cross and rose again, the victory has been won. He indeed reigns victorious seated at the right hand of God. My friend in the Domino's

pizza lobby was quick to point out the doom and gloom prophecies of Revelation and how we're living in the end times, but he didn't reference this word of hope from the beginning of the book.

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.”

Jesus Christ is king, and He is the faithful witness who tasted death for me and for you, that we also might feast at the resurrection of all flesh. Christ loves us and has freed us by the very blood that was shed on Calvary, and *we* are the kingdom of which Jesus is the king.

Every eye will see Him, even those who pierced him. The word of hope to the disciples, me, you, and all Christians throughout history is that Jesus is King *and* He is coming back. He is coming to judge both the living and the dead, and those who sought to slaughter His lambs and destroy His Church will be called to account. Jesus' reign as king is invisible for now, but there will be a day when the invisible becomes visible.

And that's where Christ the King Sunday overlaps with the Last Sunday in the Church Year. All things will be made right because Jesus is King whether you like it or not. 5. (yeah!) The King is coming back to reign! On that day we will sit down with a sigh and conclude, “I don't see how things could get any better.” Amen.