



Solemnity of Christ the King and the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary: 20th / 21st November 2022

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom”

Last Saturday I had a beautiful meal with a Chaldean Catholic Eastern Christian Family, who came to England from Iraq some years ago. I will remember the beautiful meal for a long time, but even more I will remember our conversation which ranged over a number of topics, but in particular the way Catholics can be targeted by certain Christian groups who do not hold to a number of our core beliefs and practices, in particular the way in which we honour Our Lady. The mother of the family was especially upset by this: it was like someone attacking a close loved family member; Mary is special to her and she thinks it is not acceptable to thrash her devotion to her. How right she is: her reaction is so different from that of a lady I met some years ago, who had given up speaking of Mary in her Prayer Group because of members who did not agree with devotion to her.

When we celebrate the memorial of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the coming week, we are reminded that we owe this Feast to the devotion of Christians of the East. The Feast originated as a result of the dedication of Basilica of St Mary the New, built in 543 by the Byzantines near the site of the ruined Temple in Jerusalem. The Feast continued to be celebrated throughout the East and was celebrated in the Monasteries of Southern Italy by the ninth century. It is known as the “Entry of the All-Holy Theotokos (Mother of God) into the Temple.” In his Encyclical *Marialis Cultus* (1974) Pope Paul VI says of the Presentation “it presents lofty and exemplary values and carries on the Venerable Traditions having their origins in the Eastern Churches.” The Divine Office for the Roman Catholic Church on 21 November says, “we celebrate that dedication of herself which Mary made to God from her very childhood under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who filled her with grace”.

On the Solemnity of Christ the King we are invited by the Church to renew our dedication to Christ “the centre of the universe” says McGuire, author of “Seeds for the Soul”, a series of Sunday Homilies. He writes, “This Feast was established by Pope Pius XI at the beginning of the 1900s to remind all humanity of the importance of Christ”. With the demise throughout Europe of his Kings and Queens as we knew them and the rise of the new way to govern, Pope Pius felt that there was a danger of losing the significance of the Christ event. So he established this Feast as a reminder of the centrality of Christ to the universe.”

We have become more aware of the centrality and the symbolism of the Monarch in our system of governance in the UK over the past months, so it is good to reflect on what Kingship means when we speak of Christ as King of the universe. St Paul spells it out in the letter to the Colossians:

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“He is the image of the unseen God
and the first born of all creation
for in him were created
All things in heaven and earth:
everything visible and invisible,
Thrones, Dominations, Sovereignities, Powers –
all things were created through him and for him,
God wanted all perfection
to be found in him
and all things to be reconciled through him and for him...
when he made peace
by his death on the cross.”

Thus Christ is the centre of all things created. At the same time, he is the one through whom we enter the fulness of the new creation in Paradise. By His death and resurrection Jesus brings into being a new creation; “Christ is best understood in these terms” writes Ferlita in the “Paths of Life”. Jesus makes it possible for us to join the Saints and inherit the light.

We can all identify with the words of the criminal on the Cross next to Jesus as recorded by St Luke: “remember me when you come into your Kingdom”. Jesus shows the way to that Kingdom: even in the moment of pain and suffering He loved to the end.

So as we chose the Liturgical Year, and start a new one we can take this opportunity to start anew. To recognise Christ the King in all our lives means dedicating ourselves to forgive and love as Christ did, so making Him the King of our lives.

As we celebrate the Presentation of our Blessed Lady marking her dedication of her life to God, we ask her prayers that our rededication of our lives to her Son may bear much fruit.

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