

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (Year B)

This feast, which is celebrated on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, was instituted by Pius XI on Dec. 11, 1925. It commemorates the royal power, rights and privileges of Christ and is equivalent to a declaration of his rights to the homage, service and fidelity of men in all phases of individual and social life.¹²

Daniel 7:13-14

In the dream Daniel is recounting, this vision comes right after that of four beasts emerging from the sea (the abyss below represents the powers of evil). The beasts represent four pagan kingdoms that were destroyed or that lost their dominion. The “one like the son of man” then comes, not out of the chaotic sea, but from the heavens (from God).⁵ For Daniel, this figure represents or personifies the kingdom of Israel, which receives dominion over all the nations. These people who were called to be God’s elect knew bitter struggle, persecution and exile. Daniel records the tradition that developed to give them hope of final victory over the difficulties of life.² Later developments saw the “son of man” as the promised Messiah, the messianic king, symbol of the perfect ruler who would bring justice, peace, and prosperity to Israel. He would receive homage from all the nations of the world and his reign would know no end. In the Christian experience, Jesus becomes the “son of man” by applying the title to himself. Whenever Jesus refers to himself as the “son of man” (which he did 82 times in the gospels) it reminded the people that he fulfilled this prophecy in Daniel.¹

13As the visions during the night continued, I saw one like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; Clouds are a symbol of divine presence so what we are glimpsing is heaven itself.³ when he reached the Ancient One This is a title for the everlasting God.³ and was presented before him,

14the one like a son of man received dominion, supreme authority, absolute ownership and power⁴ glory, and kingship; all peoples, nations, and languages serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed.

Daniel is about events that occur to Israel in exile in Babylon. One of the most painful features of the Babylonian exile was the apparent destruction of the Davidic monarchy of Israel. With the capture of Zedekiah and the slaying of his sons and heirs by the Babylonians, the line of the kings of Judah seems to come to an end. There is, however, one ray of hope. In 2Kings 25:27-30, we are told that Jehoiachin the rightful heir to the Davidic throne, who had reigned before his uncle Zedekiah, and who had earlier been carried off to Babylon, was released from prison and given an allowance and a place at the table of the King of Babylon. So, in the midst of the apparent loss of the Davidic dynasty, Daniel is given a vision of hope that the promise made to Israel of an enduring royal line will be fulfilled in a manner far beyond the expectations of that nation. Matthew’s Gospel begins with a genealogy that lists in its second half the members of the Davidic royal line (after the deportation to Babylon) which never sat on a throne in Jerusalem. Jesus, the last in that line, is shown to be the heir of the throne of David which had been unoccupied since the Babylonian captivity in the time of Daniel.⁶

Revelation 1:5-8

This second reading, unlike many other Sundays, has the same theme as the first reading and the Gospel.⁶ This is the only Sunday this year that we hear from the Book of Revelation. In this passage it sets out the book's primary theme of the Second Coming of Christ.² The community from which the book of Revelation was born was under threat and persecution. The thought of the coming reign of Christ would have given them great hope.⁸

5 Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, Jesus witnesses to the truth. He can be believed. He is a witness to all he has taught us about God for he came from God and fulfilled God's instructions perfectly.¹ **the firstborn of the dead** While others were raised from the dead in the scriptures, they all died again. Jesus was the first to gain victory over death.⁷ **and ruler of the kings of the earth.** This fulfills Psalm 89, which describes the coming Messiah for in verse 28 it says that "I will make him the first-born, highest of the kings of the earth." God intends Christ to rule on earth, as Christians prayed since Jesus taught them the words, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done ON EARTH as it is in heaven."¹⁰ These three titles: "*faithful witness*," "*firstborn of the dead*," and "*ruler of the kings of the earth*" remind us of the passion, the resurrection and the exaltation of Christ.⁵ **To him who loves us** The present tense indicates that Christ's love is perpetual and goes beyond the historical event of the redemption.⁵ **and has freed us from our sins by his blood,**

6 who has made us into a kingdom, Jesus not only liberated us from bondage, he has raised us to royalty: a royal house of priests, inheriting the privilege of the chosen people. Christians share the authority of the King of kings and stand as priestly mediators in the world of humankind.¹¹ **priests for his God and Father,** The whole community of believers is priestly. The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are consecrated to be a holy priesthood.⁹ (CCC 1546) Priests represent others before God and mediate God's blessings to them. All Christians offer with and in Christ their lives and the world to God and mediate the divine blessings.¹⁰ **to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.** Verses 5 and 6 are praise and verses 7 and 8 are prophecy.

7 Behold, he is coming amid the clouds, This refers to the clouds mentioned in Daniel and was understood as the glorious coming of Christ in judgment.⁵ **and every eye will see him,** Jesus will be seen by all people, even the ones who put him to death and the nations who rejected him and his church.² **even those who pierced him. All the peoples of the earth will lament him.** These are all the unbelievers who persecute the church and are thus hostile to Christ. Suffering true sorrow, all will wail.⁵ **Yes. Amen.** The repetition in Greek and Hebrew underlines the solemnity of the prophecy.⁵ It emphasizes what has just been said: "Yes indeed, THEY SHALL LAMENT BITTERLY!"

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," From the first letter of the Greek alphabet to the last, this shows a completeness from which nothing is lacking, a totality.⁵ **says the Lord God,** God is clearly identified as the speaker. "**the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty.**" Note the use of all three tenses, which emphasizes the completeness. "Almighty" means having absolute power over all. God's enemies can stir themselves and persecute his people, but all power resides permanently with him; He began history and He will terminate it!⁵

John 18:33b-37

33b Pilate Pilate was the procurator of Judea and is named in all Christian creeds as the officer who pronounced the sentence of death on Jesus. Jewish religious leaders could not sentence a person to death so in order to have Jesus crucified, they had to have the consent of the Roman leader. While Pilate was obstinate and harsh, violent and a plunderer, cruel and guilty of executing persons without legal process, all four evangelists relate that Pilate did not think Jesus guilty and tried to release him.¹³ **said to Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?”** This title was the accusation that Jesus’ enemies used as a slogan that was meant to resonate with Pilate as a threat to Roman rule.¹⁴ This was not an easy question for Jesus to answer, for to a Gentile, a king of the Jews meant simply a subverter of the Empire, while to a Jewish nationalist, the King-Messiah was a political-religious liberator who would obtain their freedom from Rome. The true character of Christ’s kingship completely transcends both these concepts as Jesus explains to the procurator.¹⁶

34 Jesus answered, “Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?”

35 Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. In verse 31, the Jewish authorities hand Jesus over to Pilate and explain that they cannot put anyone to death. **What have you done?”** After the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish, Jesus refused to be proclaimed king because the people were thinking in terms of an earthly kingdom. However, Jesus did enter Jerusalem in triumph and he did accept acclamation as King-Messiah. Now, in the Passion, he acknowledges before Pilate that he is truly a King but the Kingdom of God means truth and justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; it is the divine activity which saves men and which will reach its culmination when history ends and the Lord comes from the heights of paradise finally to judge men.¹⁶

36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom Jesus does not deny his royal mission, but he disassociates it from the political form of government that concerns Pilate. He thus turns the focus toward heaven where he will be crowned not with gold but with glory and honor and where homage is paid to him not in taxes but in worship and allegiance to the truth. The coronation of Jesus begins with his Passion and culminates with his Ascension from which time his dominion extends over the earth through the preaching and sacramental ministry of the Church.¹⁴ **does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews.** Jesus has now been handed over to the Romans but he serenely ignores the importance of the Romans. The real enemies are “the Jews.”¹⁵ **But as it is, my kingdom is not here.”** Those who expected the Messiah to have visible temporal power were mistaken.¹⁶

37 So Pilate said to him, “Then you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Earlier in 10:3 we were told that the sheep hear or listen to the voice of the shepherd. This parallel is interesting because the shepherd motif has its background in the OT portrait of the king for the Patriarchs, Moses, and David were all shepherds and so “shepherd” became a figurative term for the rulers of God’s people and here Jesus is answering a question about his kingship. Thus those who belong to the truth are the sheep given to Jesus by the Father; but those who do not hear or listen do not belong to God. In 1 John 3:18-19 we are given a practical way of testing who belongs to the truth: men show

by deeds that their love is genuine instead of merely talking with words.¹⁵ Those who recognize Christ's kingship and sovereignty accept his authority, and he thus reigns over them in an eternal and universal kingdom but he reigns in hearts and not in armies. If we want to have Christ as our king, we must start by giving him our heart. Then, if we let Christ reign in our souls, we will serve everyone. Finally, if we witness to Christ and his kingship, a life of cross-bearing will also be necessary.¹⁶

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2005" by Aelred R. Rosser, (2) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1997" by Lawrence E. Mick, (3) "Workbook For Lectors And Gospel readers: 1991" by Graziano Marcheschi with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, (4) "Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary," (5) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (6) The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Grey, (7) "The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (8) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2006" by Martin Connell, (9) "Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (10) "The Apocalypse and the Third Millennium" by George T. Montague, S.M., (11) "Revelation" by Wilfrid J. Harrington, O.P., (12) "Catholic Almanac:1995" by Our Sunday Visitor, (13) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (14) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John," (15) "The Gospel of St. John" by Raymond E. Brown, S.S., and (16) "The Navarre Bible: St. John."

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.