

**PILGRIMAGE OF CHRIST THE KING:  
SERMON AT PONTIFICAL MASS AT THE FALDSTOOL,  
SACRED HEART CATHEDRAL, BENDIGO,  
SUNDAY OCTOBER 28 2007**

**Most Rev. Peter J Elliott, STD**

**Titular Bishop of Manaccenser, Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne**

My Lord Bishop, first let me express my gratitude for being invited to celebrate this Solemn Pontifical Mass in your beautiful cathedral of the Sacred Heart Bendigo, the symbolic goal of this annual Pilgrimage of Christ the King. I offer this Mass for the late Bishop Bernard Stewart and the late Bishop Noel Daly, in this their cathedral.

To offer the Divine Sacrifice for and with so many faithful Catholics is a great joy, especially at this time when we are giving thanks to God for the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum* of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, a pastoral provision which rests on the recognition of a canonical reality, responding to the just aspirations of Christ's faithful.

Today we celebrate the Universal Kingship of Jesus Christ. At this altar of sacrifice, in a text common to both forms of the Roman Rite, the majestic tones of the preface will ring out once more. The inspiring rhythm of the timeless language of the Roman Rite will proclaim the eternal Kingdom of Jesus Christ: "...regnum veritatis et vitae, regnum sanctitatis et gratiae, regnum iustitiae, amoris et pacis": "A kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace."

However, in recent decades there has been a tendency to "spiritualise" the reign of Christ. I regret that this is even evident in the texts provided in the post-conciliar breviary. Certainly, the kingdom of heaven is "within us", and Jesus should reign spiritually and morally in our lives. But once we reduce those words "truth", "life", "holiness", "grace", "justice", "love" and "peace" to abstractions or nice sentiments then something is missing - and what is missing is precisely what motivated Pius XI of blessed memory to institute this feast. It is the *social reign of Jesus Christ*.

The social reign of Christ – the very expression is fraught with meaning, yet it may be threatening when we reflect on what it can mean. It challenges us. We may speculate, therefore, why Christ's social reign has been played down, spiritualised or even set aside. Forty years ago, there was a nervous reaction against so-called "triumphalism". Moreover, some feared that a literal interpretation of Christ's reign on earth might herald establishing hieratic states or authoritarian systems. Some critics, on the one hand, and some imprudent partisans of Christ's social reign, on the other, were equally ill-informed in matters of history. With different agendas they depicted the social reign of Christ the King in terms of the recovery of Christendom or the "ancien regime" and "integralism". Then there were voices, and we still hear them, who say that the gilded image of a king is out of place in our grey world, awash with republics. Others contend that kingship does not accord well with the Church's social teachings and her struggle for justice, human rights and her favour for democracy.

Yet, within this modern social context it seems strange to me that Christ's social reign should be put aside or spiritualised. It is precisely when the Church is openly striving for truth, life, peace and justice in so many different social situations around the world that we need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ the King. It is his Gospel which animates the social teachings of the Church. It is his reign that we seek to promote in struggling for truth, life and freedom. If we do not always look to our King in personal faith, we cannot hold securely to his moral principles in legislation, law and policy. What is worse, we risk being seduced by anti-life ideologies, old and new, with all their enticing moral compromises, and that has been the fate of some politicians who yet claim membership of our Church.

Yet, Jesus Christ will reign, no matter what secularists old or new attempt, no matter how grandiose their plans for social engineering may be, no matter what affluent forces they raise against human life, freedom, justice, married love and the family. He does reign, for he has conquered death by rising in his own body and ascending to glory. Thus we need to keep the vision of his Kingdom before us, for it is at the heart of the Gospels, the good news of his Resurrection..

In the Gospel we have just heard, jesting Pilate asks Our Lord, "Are you a king then?" In front of him stood the King of the ages. Here was truth, crowned with thorns, bejewelled in his own blood, clothed in a royal rag, a frail reed for his sceptre. Here was truth looking Pilate in the eye, the sad reproach of concrete reality that still confronts a world led astray by post-modern fantasy, fear and pride. "As you say, I am a king. For this I was born, for this I came into the world, that I might give witness to the truth and whoever is of the truth hears my voice". He who is the Way, the Truth and the Life uttered those words, and so he speaks to us. "Yes, I am a king..."

In the past century of ideologies and exaggerated nationalisms, it was Christ's truth, his higher order of Christian ethics and social justice, that raised the hearts and minds of so many of our brothers and sisters. Christ the King fired the hearts of "los Cristeros" in Mexico when these poor folk rose against an atheistic regime, based on fascism and socialism and driven by Grand Orient freemasonry. It was this Lord of life who led the Jesuit martyr, the Blessed Miguel Pro, to cry "Long live Christ the King!" as he threw out his arms to embrace the bullets of the firing squad. It was this Lord of truth who, in less dramatic ways, guided countless young people in Catholic Action and the social movements struggling for liberty against totalitarianism. It was this Lord, whose reign embraces all kingdoms, who brought hope and patience to Christians suffering under Nazi racism, Fascist oppression and Communist terror.

In hatred of this social reign of Christ Stalin asked sarcastically how many divisions the Pope had. How many indeed? A familiar Christian hymn gives him a firm answer. There is "another country", another kingdom, Christ's reign breaking through in his Church, and while "we may not count her armies" and "we may not see her king", we know that: "Her fortress in a faithful heart, her pride is suffering. And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase. And her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace."

Today it is Christ's reign of justice and mercy which can bring hope to the poor in the favelas of Brazil, crowded in the sprawling slums of great Asian cities, or struggling in the tattered tents of Darfur. The Kingdom can offer hope to the poor caught

between the conflicts of the Middle East, hope to the desperate ones fleeing their lands and seeking refuge in our midst. His Kingdom and a dutiful service of his reign inspires so many Christians to expend their lives for these little ones of the earth. Men and women leave the security of our rich society and give and give, living the Eucharistic mystery in self-expenditure, “for the sake of the Kingdom”, all for the sake of those humble ones. These are the citizens of the Kingdom who stand with Mary the Mother of the King, hence the Queen of Peace. In her Magnificat she assures them that the thrones of the mighty and the abundance enjoyed by the rich count for nothing in His Kingdom. It is here that the meek inherit the earth.

But, if I emphasise today the social reign of the Lord Jesus, I need to place this in the spiritual or, let us say, the supernatural perspective. My call to you, and to myself, is a simple call to faith: “Let Jesus reign!”

Let him reign in your hearts as you welcome him once more in the Holy Eucharist. Let him reign in your families, in your houses and apartments, in your schools and universities, in workplaces, farms, factories, shops and offices. Let him reign among your circle of friends and family as you witness and strive to establish on earth the Kingdom of truth, life, holiness, grace, justice, love and peace.

Yet we know that while this kingdom of the risen Lord Jesus is here, it is still to come, still to be completed. Scripture attests to this mysterious tension between where we are now and where we shall be. In that light we try to understand the familiar petition he gave us, uttered many millions of times every day: “Adveniat regnum tuum...” “Thy kingdom come”. Yet his own words that follow immediately make it so clear, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..” This is the mandate for the royal People of God.: we are called to do the will of God, here and now, to seek to know that will, to fulfil it and so extend the Kingdom. May the Eucharistic King we will offer and receive open our hearts to do his will and come at last into his eternal Kingdom.