



## November 25, 2018 - Christ the King

Given by Rev. Mattei

What image comes to mind when you think of Jesus? The Shepherd, the gentle Friend of children, the Healer and Great Physician, the Risen One, the Lover of the world crucified on the Cross, the Lion of Judah, the One who walks on water, the Transfigured One, the One praying in Gethsemane, the scourged One crowned with a crown of thorns and presented by Pilate to the crowd by saying: “Ecce Homo, here is the man.” ([Jn 19:5](#)), the Judge and mighty King who sits in judgment, the Alpha and the Omega, the Almighty, the silent Lamb brought to slaughter ([Is 53:5-10](#))?

The image of [Christ the King](#), the stern savior and judge, grasping the book of the Gospels in his left hand and imparting a blessing with his right is one of the most popular icons of the ancient Church. There was a reason for that: the early Church very much needed a Christ who manifested his power and assured that the martyrs' blood was not spilled in vain. To a persecuted Church where people suffer all sorts of injustices, are socio-economically marginalized and even physically punished often with the ultimate punishment, Christ the King is the promise of redemption, respite, and reward. The cruel, the violent, the murderer, the exploiter, the compassionless *will* be brought to eternal justice. Even though they might have the upper hand for now, their time is counted ([Psalm 2](#); [Psalm 37](#)): “the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings” (17:14). The image of the King was a consolation to all those who suffered here on earth and hoped for a better life in God with all the saints of the [Church Triumphant](#) in heaven. Resurrection was their vindication and the [martyrs](#) walked toward death [singing hymns](#) as we are [told](#).

The image of Christ the King assumed a totally different meaning once Christianity became the State Religion in the 4th century under Constantine the Great. Showered with political protection and favors, the Church became powerful and associated with Empire to the point of making the boundaries between the spiritual and secular realms blurry, possessing estate and wielding political power. Associating political power to the King of kings has facilitated the Church to seek and justify the many different forms of crusades and spiritual as well as political colonialism throughout the centuries.

But Jesus is a different kind of king. In the gospel of John, he has been introduced from the start like the one who has spiritual authority over the new Israel (John 1:49). Yet, Jesus is not a king that the world would ever recognize. This is a king who speaks to the lowly and the rejected. This is a king who serves rather than being served. Jesus does have a kingdom, but it is not a kingdom of this world. So, the question is: What kind of kingdom is it?

“What kind of king are you?” Pontius Pilate seems genuinely interested in why the Jews seem to hate Jesus so much. Pilate wants to see if he has a political rebellion on his hands; it’s his job to control the masses and disarm any possible conflict; appeasing the religious leaders and keeping them on the Roman side could be a helpful strategy. Everybody knows that power comes from might and that empires are built on wealth obtained by threatening military force, oppression, and coercion. The Roman Empire kept people in line with violence and crucifixion.

Jesus tells us that his kingdom looks different. His kingdom is in many ways the opposite of the Roman Empire. Jesus certainly offers an alternative to the Roman Emperor. Jesus’ kingdom lifts up the least, the lost, the wounded, and the lonely. His kingdom sees leadership as service to others, not pushing others around. His kingdom is based on healing and love, not force and pain. Jesus seeks to liberate and elevate, not to judge and put down. He is ready to offer understanding and compassion, not vilification and slander. In Jesus’ kingdom, people are valued, respected and appreciated as the human beings they are, not as objects to be used and abused for personal gain. Under his rule, people treat each other with compassion and not with contempt or for personal gain, no matter the party affiliation, the religious background, the ideological outlook,

their social status or nationality. In his kingdom, people simply serve and demonstrate kindness and generosity. In his kingdom, there is joy of living.

Immediately following the shooting at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburg, PA, Tarek El-Messidi took to Launch Good to raise funds for the Synagogue and the victims' families. The interesting thing is not that funds were raised, but that a [Muslim organization](#) did it. El-Messidi's goal was to raise \$25,000.00 to help with the funeral expenses of the victims of the shooting. He raised that amount in merely six hours and has closed the campaign after having raised more than \$238,000.00. "We wish to respond to evil with good, as our faith instructs us, and send a powerful message of compassion through action," he wrote on the organization's webpage. "I think it says that there's a lot more good in humanity than there is bad and evil and hatred," said El-Messidi in a radio interview. Those who belong to the Kingdom come in many colors languages and traditions.

Do we live in the reign of God following the servant king? Do we model the same humility and care towards others that he displayed? Do we live lives that reflect that service? Do we reach out to the least and the lost? Do we testify to the truth of God? It is the truth that Jesus came to the world to bring love and forgiveness. Are we citizens of that kingdom? May we learn from him, the merciful One toward whom the whole creation is oriented. Amen.