Feast of Christ the King, Year C
A Sermon Preached by Dr Trevor Kimball
on November 23, 2025

Jeremiah 23:1-6 / Psalm 46 / Colossians 1:11-20 / Luke 23:33-43

May I speak in the name
of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It's October 1917, outside the small Belgian village of Passchendaele. It's been raining for weeks. As the first light of dawn starts to filter across the sky, thousands of soldiers climb out of trenches and charge forward into the muck.

Months of shelling and autumn rain had churned the earth into a bottomless mire. The men moved forward, but even as Machine-gun fire swept across the ridgelines, the mud itself posed just as much danger. A soldier who was there reported the following:

"Now the mud at Passchendaele was very viscous indeed, very tenacious, it stuck to you. Your putties were solid mud anyway. But it stuck to you all over, it slowed you down. It got into the bottom of your trousers, you were covered with mud. The mud there wasn't liquid, it wasn't porridge; it was a curious kind of sucking kind of mud. When you got off this track with your load, it 'drew' at you, not like a quicksand, but a real monster that sucked at you."

By the end of the day, thousands of men had been killed or wounded—most of them still within sight of the trench they started from. And the land they "won" that morning was lost again within days. This was one day in the Third Battle of Ypres, a campaign that cost over half a million lives and gained only five miles of ruined earth. Entire battalions disappeared into the mud. Passchendaele became a symbol of the Great War's futility—a place where human ambition and national pride were pushed to their limits.

What can you say after this? What can you say about your country? Your comrades? Your enemy? What can you say about God? A shell shocked Europe grabbled with these questions.

T. S. Eliot describes this malaise in his poem The Hollow Men, written one hundred years ago in 1925. To quote just a few lines:

“We are the hollow men,
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!”_

Europe was spiritually exhausted, unsure what it believed, uncertain what authority—if any—could be trusted. The old order had led to trenches and graves. The promises of progress gave way to paralysis.

And in the same year Eliot published his poem, Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical Quas Primas and established the Feast of Christ the King.

It was a timely message. The kings of the world had flexed their power to the greatest extent - and ended up in Passchendaele. Four kings lost power as a result of the war. Tsar Nicholas II of Russian, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and Prussia, Emperor Karl I of Austro Hungary, and Sultan Mehmed VI of the Ottoman Empire.

And into this spiritual and political void, the feast is designed to remind us about the true king who reins over all.

In it he wrote, quoting Cyril of Alexandria:

“Christ has dominion over all creatures, a dominion not seized by violence nor usurped, but His by essence and by nature.”

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What a contrast from the kings that sent men into the mud.

The pope goes on: His kingship is founded upon the ineffable hypostatic union.”

The hypostatic union is simply the Church’s ancient way of saying that in Jesus Christ, divinity and humanity dwell perfectly and fully in one person—without confusion or division. Not half-God and half-man, but the fullness of God in the fullness of one human life.

And that’s exactly what Paul proclaims in Colossians:

“He is the image of the invisible God… for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”

The reign of Christ is established because he is the creator of all, because, “all things have been created through him and for him.”
We aren’t very comfortable with Kings today. In fact, ‘No Kings’ is the slogan of the moment. We don’t like the idea of being ruled over, or of any one person having the final say over our lives, and for good reason! We want to direct our own destiny.

But to submit to Christ the King is not like assenting to the rule of a human being. Christ’s kingship is revealed not in displays of force but in vulnerability. He doesn’t send us ahead to be churned out by the mud. Instead, he sends his Son.

The eternal life of God arrives in the world as a child who must be fed and sheltered. And the same pattern continues at the cross: God’s action is made visible in a body that cannot move, cannot defend itself, and yet radiates mercy.

Which is what we see in our Gospel reading. Jesus hangs between two criminals under the mocking title “King of the Jews.”

Jesus was not killed for being “too spiritual,” but because his love had public consequences. Rome did not crucify harmless teachers. Rome crucified those who threatened its order. Jesus gathered crowds, spoke of God’s kingdom in the present tense, challenged systems of exclusion, and created a new community around himself—a community that welcomed the poor, the unclean, the outsider. To Rome, and to certain religious leaders, this looked dangerously like a rival kingdom.

And this matters right now.

Our own temptations—to distrust the stranger, to withdraw into self-protection, to imagine we can secure ourselves by force—are the very things Christ came to heal.

To confess Christ as King is not simply to proclaim his divinity. It is to live as subjects of his kingdom—to see every person through the lens of his love.

May we have the courage to live as citizens of that kingdom, today and every day.

Amen.