

Earlier this month, one of my nieces got married right here at Curé of Ars. One of her sisters was extra excited about “*the wedding*” because her sister was marrying a man from Great Britain and she saw this ceremony as our own family’s – “royal wedding” – an American princess marrying a British prince! (Well, not quite!) But what is it about America’s fascination with royalty? Did you watch “the” Royal Wedding a few months ago between Britain’s Prince Harry and the “commoner” named Megan Markel (an America). There was as much interest on this side of the “pond” as there was in England.

Every week supermarket tabloids feature cover stories about the secret or private lives of various royal families around the world. Imagine *that* (!!!) – in this country (America) – which came to birth out of the sweat and blood revolution against the British Rule of King George. There’s even a lot of interest over the past few weeks around the Royal Family and “The Crown Prince” of Saudi Arabia – after the brutal murder of the Washington Post journalist (in Turkey). And have you read about all the concerns related to romaine lettuce with the e-coli bacteria? Even after 2000 years, Julius Caesar (King and Emperor of Rome) still has ‘*power*’ to destroy lives (or at least a good meal) in his Caesar Salad lettuce!

So, even in America kings and emperors have a fascination if not some type of power over our imaginations and the daily news cycle. Of course, we don’t have too many real kings anymore in the world – just a handful of monarchies and some despots and dictators to be sure. Nevertheless, it still may still sound a bit foreign to us to hear that today is – The Solemnity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ the King of the Universe.

But actually, we speak of Jesus as King – in a metaphorical sense – one of many titles used in the Bible. Sometimes Jesus was called a shepherd, a prophet, or his most frequent salutation – “teacher.” Many of these titles are simply efforts to use the language we know to describe something or someone – beyond our experience. But no metaphor completely captures the entire essence of that which it attempts to illuminate.

And this is true of the metaphor of king. Like all metaphors, it was used because it drew on something familiar to the original hearers in the Biblical era. Unlike today, the prevailing government model was the monarchy. Even Israel had kings, as did all the surrounding countries of their day. In the days of Jesus, Rome was the occupying force in Palestine, and they were ruled by a Caesar, a position and title equivalent to king in every way. And within Israel, King Herod still ruled, under the authority of Caesar.

The people of the first century could scarcely imagine a world without a king. (It was all they had ever known.) And so to speak of the reign of Christ, the authority of Christ, or the obedience to Christ, it is completely natural to draw on the metaphor of a monarchy, an empire, a realm.

Perhaps today we might think of different metaphors closer to our common experience to describe the majesty and dominion of Christ (i.e. “Jesus the Perpetual President of the Universe,” or the “Super Nova;” or something grand). But as we look closely at the Gospel lesson for today, which features a private conversation between Jesus and the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, we see that Jesus clearly didn’t “fit” the typical mold of a king. Pilate was charged by Caesar to keep the peace, (the “Pax Romana,”) in the province where he was assigned. He cared little about local Jewish regulations or religion. But he tolerated them in so far as religion and rules - kept the people (the populace) in line.

So when the Jewish religious leaders brought Jesus to Pilate for a capital sentence, he was un-impressed by their claim that Jesus of Nazareth was a heretic, or that he claimed to be the “son of God”. What got his attention, however, was when the religious leaders changed the charge to sedition, to treason against Rome, accusing Jesus of claiming to be the King of the Jews. That was a different matter altogether for Pilate. If Jesus was claiming political or military power, he was a threat to Rome.

And so the trial before Pilate began, circling again and again around the question of whether Jesus actually claimed to be the king of the Jews. And you'll notice that Jesus never gave Pilate a direct answer. He kept dodging the question with questions of his own, talking in the language of *double entendre* so that Pilate could not quite nail him down (as it were) on the charge. It almost seems more that Pilate is on trial before Jesus, rather than the other way around. Finally, Pilate in exasperation handed Jesus over to be crucified, an attempt to nail him down literally, even though he couldn't do it verbally.

And over the cross, the ironic sign read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of Jews." Of course the Jewish leaders were outraged (about that) asking Pilate to re-write the sign to read: that Jesus only claimed to be their King. But in fact Jesus did just the opposite. He never accepted that title. Because he knew that the multiple meanings for king weren't accurate descriptions of his type of *reign* or, of his Kingdom.

Jesus didn't come to establish the government of Israel, or to overthrow Rome, or to set up any earthly kingdom. His reach and His reign were much broader, much more eternal, and much more personal than that.

And so today, on Christ the King Sunday, we do well to honor our Lord, to give him worship and obedience, to recognize his reign over the Kingdom of God. But like the original hearers of scripture, we must also resist applying the metaphor of king too tightly or too literally.

Jesus Christ reigns in the hearts and souls of those who love him. His Kingdom isn't drawn on a map, or guarded by weapons at the borders. His Kingdom is anywhere and anytime men and women freely and joyously choose to live as He lived in obedience to his teaching, following his model and loving both God and neighbor with sacrificial and selfless hearts. Whenever that happens, it is like heaven on earth. Whenever that happens, we honor and please our Lord, our Messiah, Christ our King.

We American Christians have a kind of dual citizenship: We are the people of the United States, but our hearts belong to Christ who claims our first allegiance and our deepest loyalty. When church and state are in conflict, it's my serious and solemn responsibility to understand the conflict and the differences and import of its terms.

As a member of the republic, I have a responsibility to participate fully and knowledgeably in our government. As a Catholic Christian I have a responsibility to know and understand what the Lord, through the Church, teaches and to integrate that teaching, that wisdom as honestly and fully as possible in my life. But in all of this, I will fail in allegiance and loyalty to Christ the King if I don't seek, earnestly, to grow in my relationship with Him.

He calls us to be his brothers and sisters, not his subjects. He is not hidden behind palace walls, but rather lives in our hearts. He did not inherit his royalty but rather he earned it, being crowned with the thorns of His suffering and nailed to the throne of his Cross: all of this testimony to the truth of his love for us.

This morning we're invited to dine at the King's Table. Here he invites us to share in His life, the life He offers us in the Bread of Angels and the Cup of Salvation. He comes to us today, not on the clouds of heaven, but in the simplicity of this meal which is the sacrifice of His life. He comes to claim dominion over us by laying down his life in service of us and calling us, members of the royal family, even if we never attend a "royal wedding" to do the same for one another.

Pray that we open our hearts to enthrone our King who gives us here a taste and a sip of that royal feast which he has prepared for us in His kingdom where His *truth* is forever and His peace is everlasting.