

“I’m a Monarchist and I vote!” I’ve never actually laid eyes on that bumper sticker, but I have it on good authority that it exists and can be seen on the bumper of a Catholic scholar’s car here in western Washington. I laughed a bit when I heard about it. I interpreted it, not as a call for a new Constitution, but as a declaration of his own faith in, and fidelity to, Christ the King.

Today’s Feast of Christ the King is relatively new in the Catholic Church’s liturgical calendar. It was established by Pope Pius XI back in 1925, a time of shifting and chaotic political movements in the world. Europe was exhausted from the bloody First World War. The Russian communist revolution was spreading. Mussolini and the Fascists were on the move in Italy. It was a time of growing secularism and atheism. So, the Pope wanted to remind Catholics, and the whole world, that Jesus was ultimately in command of history. He should reign in our hearts above any earthly leader, government, party, or movement.

Many people feel the world today is being shaken and threatened by dangerous forces and movements – not so different from the early twentieth century. There is ISIS and other jihadist groups. There are the seemingly weekly mass shootings. Some look at President Trump and see disaster threatening the country and world. Others look at him and see an answer and antidote to different threats. Some see the climate being damaged beyond repair. Others see that as dangerous delusion and panic. Will there be a nuclear war with North Korea? Will artificial intelligence liberate us – or destroy humanity?

Wherever we come down on those and similar questions – whatever our bumper stickers say -- and I don't just mean literal bumper stickers, most of us have our own mental bumper stickers declaring how we understand the world -- there is a growing perception that our politics, morals, culture – our whole world, is shaky, and up for grabs. How are we to maintain our peace and navigate such strange times?

The Church, and this feast day, would answer, “By being faithful to Christ our King.” In politics and international law the term “sovereignty” describes an ultimate and independent authority. Emperors, kings, queens, have thus historically been called “sovereigns.” Every person has multiple loyalties in life. But if we want to face the anxieties and dangers of today’s world with tranquility and virtue, then we should acknowledge Jesus as our Sovereign.

There are two challenges to doing that for us, independent Americans. First, it’s hard to accept any kind of monarchy as legitimate in a democracy (hence the punch of that bumper sticker). But what I mean is simply that there is a truth and loyalty deeper even than those of our class, race, gender, party, democratic political system, or even country.

On the other hand, it’s easy for us to say, “Jesus is Lord,” but how do we know if we’re all talk, or if we really do hold Christ as our Sovereign? Here’s one test: ask yourself this question, “When my

personal opinions are in conflict with the teaching of Jesus and the Catholic Church He founded, which wins out?” Which is my ultimate standard of truth (my sovereign) – Jesus’ Gospel, or some other belief system? Which judges the other when they disagree? (Remember in the Gospel today Christ the King is also the Final Judge). Put another way: do I put the principles of my political conservatism or progressivism, my patriotism, my feminism, my environmentalism, or any other -ism, above the teaching of Jesus?

Or, here’s another way for Catholics to think about the question, “Is Jesus Christ my Sovereign King?” When I describe myself to myself, is my Catholicism the noun or an adjective? In politics, for example, am I a Republican Catholic or a Catholic Republican, a Democratic Catholic, or a Catholic Democrat? Am I an American Catholic, or a Catholic American, that is, an American who happens to be Catholic, or a Catholic who happens to be American? There’s a difference between them, and it lies in the depth of our allegiance and self-identity. It

reveals which would be easier to give up. Is our faith the noun, or an adjective?

When we profess Christ to be our King it doesn't mean we don't believe in democracy. It doesn't mean we don't practice political and cultural involvement and advocacy. Remember "I'm a Monarchist and I vote!" We should vote and be active, vocal citizens with our own viewpoints. And, certainly, all these viewpoints have insights that can inform our Catholic faith. But, like all earthly philosophies, they also all have aspects the Gospel must pass judgment on.

The way through these disorienting times is to hold ever closer to that teaching and Person of Jesus. He's meant to be our Sovereign, and the strong, still point within ourselves through all the chaos. Our tranquility in all the fears and anxieties and the clash of forces moving our world will depend most of all on whether we can honestly call Jesus "Lord" -- or not.

On this last Sunday of the Church's year, she offers us that chance to interiorly pledge our first allegiance again to Christ as our sovereign King. It's a crazy world. I don't know what the future holds -- except that Christ wins in the end. So, as it was a century ago when this Feast was first celebrated, so today – we need to remember that Jesus is in command of history and the world, and if He reigns in our hearts above any passing earthly power claiming our loyalty, we can see our way through any challenge to our peace.