

CHRIST THE KING, 2022

The last Sunday of the Liturgical Year is designated “Christ the King Sunday”. Jesus Christ is, of course, our King every Sunday and every day. On Christ the King Sunday we recall solemnly what the fact of His Kingship makes us. We are His Church, and His Kingship makes His Church His herald in the world, His messenger, given the task of proclaiming to the world a piece of tremendous Good News.

With due respect to various people of good will, the Church of Jesus Christ does not exist primarily to listen, but to announce in word and deed Good News, News so good that people’s first response is to think it too good to be true. We announce to all humanity that the mysterious Force that formed the world has chosen not remain mysterious, but has visited the world in Person and in the Flesh. Not in a fairy tale “once upon a time”, but in those very specific days when Augustus Caesar ruled in Rome, the Unseen Being that is the source of all things walked in this world and lived among men and, mystically but truly present in His Church, lives among them still.

Many great thinkers have thought deep thoughts about the Mysterious Force of Creation, the Unseen Being behind all things. What we offer is much better than deep thoughts. We offer to introduce people personally to Him, as He lives incarnate in Jesus Christ. Many of the world’s peoples have tales about supernatural beings being busy in this world. What we offer is much better than tales about supernatural beings. We offer to introduce people to the Being behind all Nature and all Supernature, as He lives incarnate in Jesus Christ.

Prophets have called themselves messengers of the Mysterious Being, but only Jesus Christ is the Mysterious Being in the Flesh. Mystics have claimed some glimpse of the Mysterious Being, but only Jesus Christ is the Mysterious Being made visible. Mankind’s myths have, quite wisely, imagined the One Through Whom All Things Were Made being present at Creation; but only the Church’s Gospel proclaims that the One Through Whom All Things Were Made was present at Palestinian dinner parties in the First Century A.D., and is present, mystically but truly, in the Church’s Dinner that we call the Holy Eucharist.

This message, the Church’s message, OUR message, is utterly unlike any other message on earth. This sentence from the prologue of St. John’s Gospel, “The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us”, is the most tremendous sentence spoken by Man since some creature of genus “homo” and species “sapiens” first spoke a sentence. No one but the Church dares speak this sentence. To proclaim this sentence is our chief reason for existence. We dare not not speak it.

When the Word became Flesh and Dwelt among us, more than 2000 years ago, the human race was busily running in circles, seeking enlightenment from some philosopher or visionary, and seeking safety and security from some prince or potentate. The human race still runs in circles. The Church does not. The Church proclaims a message.

Messengers proclaim messages. They may try to argue the truth of the message, but that is very much a secondary, or even tertiary function. Their primary function is simply to announce the message. Their secondary function is to act like they take it seriously. There is room in the Church for apologists, people who make arguments for the reasonableness of the message. Still, making arguments is not the Church's primary nor even her secondary function. Her primary function is to announce the Message. Her secondary function is to live the Message. We do not offer this Message a theory for consideration, but as a fact for celebration. If people believe the message, their lives change. In this respect, we do draw a line, a line between those who do not believe the Good News, and so do not benefit from it, and those who do believe, and so benefit from it.

The great Spanish lay catechist Kiko Arguello once compared the Church to a famous runner. In 490 B.C., the Persian Empire resolved to annihilate the defiant city of Athens. It meant to slay the able bodied males in battle, to slay also the old and the infants, and to enslave the rest. The able bodied males of Athens marched to meet the Persian force on the plain of Marathon 26 miles away. There they and the Persian invasion force would grapple to the death. Those left in the city, women, children, and those men too young or too old to fight, waited in mortal anxiety to hear the outcome of the struggle. The city's council sent a final dispatch to the Strategoi who led the city's able bodied men in battle. Poor in horses but rich in athletes, the city entrusted the message to a runner. He ran 26 miles to the plain of Marathon to deliver the message, and then waited to see the outcome of the fight. Against reasonable expectation, when the men of Athens and the Persian invasion force came to death grips, it was the Persian invasion force that died. Thrilled like he had never been thrilled before, the runner ran the 26 miles back to Athens as fast as he possibly could. He broke his body in the effort, and died as he exclaimed his good news with the one word, repeated again and again, "Nike! Nike! Nike! . . . Victory! Victory! Victory!" For all those in Athens who believed that good news, their lives changed in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye. Fear was swallowed up by victory. That, said Kiko Arguello, is the mission of the Church in the world. The Church exists to proclaim to a human race dwelling in darkness and the shadow of death a simple message: Nike! Nike! Nike! Our King is the Creating Word Made Flesh, and our King, having tasted death in the Flesh, has conquered it in the Flesh. If we belong to Him death is defeated. True belief in that Good News changes people's lives.

We, the people of Jesus Christ's Church, are to be runners in this world. We are to run as fast we can to every corner of the earth and proclaim the victory of Jesus Christ over Fear and over Evil.. Having encountered Him alive and mystically present in our word and worship, we are to run with the passion of eyewitnesses, people who have seen Fear defeated and Evil crushed. We are to risk our lives to bring people this good news, risk our lives with an abandon that to the world looks like suicide, but is actually joy. That runner of Marathon died of joy, really, breaking his body to let his people know that they would live and be free. We are to die of joy, letting ourselves be broken, if necessary, to let the peoples of this world know that they will live and be free, because of the victory won by Jesus Christ. The world around us grows old, muttering again and again that ignoble phrase "out of an abundance of caution". We are forbidden to

abound in caution, as we grow young, filled with an abundance of joy, the words 'Nike!' and "Alleluia" always on our lips.

I have no patience with meek and mild theologians whose main concern seems to minimize the shock of the Christian message. A message so colossal can only be shocking, and it is folly to try to minimize the shock. I honor the strict monotheists, Muslims and Jews for example, who are shocked by it. A fine 12th Century Muslim Arab gentlemen wrote about the time his friends among the Templar knights took him on a tour of their church, and showed him a statue of our Infant Lord with His Mother, saying "This is an image of God as a Baby" The Muslim Arab gentleman was deeply shocked, and should be honored for being shocked. It is a shock that the One God is also Three - but what Good News it is that He is not Cosmic Loneliness, but rather Cosmic Love! It is a shock that God so loved the world He created that He chose to become part of it - but what Good News it is that He so loves His Creation! It is a shock that He truly assumed our human Flesh and Nature, truly died in that Flesh and Nature, truly Rose from death in that Flesh and Nature, and truly lives on in that human Flesh and Nature. Our whole glorious creed is a shock, and the best possible shock. This is the shock that gives Life, and gives it to the full.

Crazy, the world says.

But, seriously, who is crazy? Around us the world reels drunkenly, into ethical systems that endorse baby killing, into psychological systems that deny the reality of human consciousness, into pessimism that announces that the earth would be better off without human beings, and into pragmatism that urges people to do whatever they can get away with doing. The world around us is very nearly drunk enough to declare that there is no such thing as either good or evil, and that three plus three can add up to seven, if you really, really, want it to, and wish upon a star. In the midst of such craziness our message is solid. Our bold Good News makes us capable of thinking seriously, unlike the materialists for whom human consciousness is only a matter of chemical reactions and electrical impulses. Our bold Good News makes us capable of laughing happily, unlike the pessimists who think of humanity as cancer on the earth. Our bold Good News gives us the light to see the world as it truly is, created in goodness, given freedom, deeply wounded by freedom's misuse in sin, and redeemed by the One Through Whom All Things Were Made entering the world He made, and then working, slowly but irresistibly, to redeem it from within.

Such is our King. He assumed our Flesh and entered our History at a time when the world was not in a good mood, as it is not in a good mood today. In the intervening 2000 years the world's moods have ebbed and flowed, as has the world's sanity. To those who have, during those millennia, believed the Good News, there has been given the ability to be clearer in thought, more level headed in crisis, more reasonable in expectations, more healthy in desires, more humorous in the face of danger, and more calm in the face of death, than those spinning in the world around the Church. Jesus Christ our King has kept us sane and healthy, and He keeps us sane and healthy still. As we announce Jesus Christ to the world, we extend this invitation to the world: Do you want to be sane and healthy? Come to Him. Come and listen. There is a

time and place for debating, but debating is a third thing. The first thing is to listen, and the second is to live. So, first, come and listen. 0 Come and listen to Him, Who is Truth. And He will set you free.