

Feast of Christ the King, 26 October 2003

The Lord shall sit a king for ever: the Lord shall bless His people in peace.

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There is a celebrated story of a young pagan emperor who, many years ago, shortly before a crucial battle, saw in the sky a vision of the Cross, and beneath it the words, "In hoc signum vinces." [In this sign you will conquer.] The emperor quickly ordered the monogram to be emblazoned on his shield and on those of his troops. He had every reason to do so, as the enemy forces he faced outnumbered his own five to one. The emperor was Constantine, the year was 312, and on October 28th, the two armies engaged each other in battle by the river Tiber near the famous Milvian Bridge. And in the sign of the Cross, Constantine *did* conquer. With his victory, a new era began for the Church, an era in which the State, slowly but surely, and not always without difficulties and setbacks, recognized the rule and sway of Christ the King.

There is another celebrated story, this time of a simple and saintly nun, to whom Our Lord appeared some 300 years ago in a series of visions between the years 1673 and 1675. And on June 16th, 1675, Our Lord revealed to her His Sacred Heart. The nun was none other than that faithful servant, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, and the primary purpose of this singular revelation concerning the Sacred Heart was to re-ignite the love of God in men whose hearts had grown cold, men who, having been oppressed by the gloomy specter of Jansenism, had lost the hope of salvation and no longer knew the love of God for them. In this Sacred Heart, mankind had, in the words of Pope Leo XIII, "another blessed and heavenly token offered to our sight, with a cross rising from it and shining forth with dazzling splendor amidst flames of love."

Although separated by nearly 1400 years, Constantine's vision of the Cross and St. Margaret Mary's vision of the cross arising from the Sacred Heart are united by a common objective, a common purpose. That purpose is nothing less than the spreading of the Kingship of Christ throughout the world. For His is a most gentle rule animated by infinite love: exactly what the families of nations need if they are to be healed of their sin-inflicted wounds.

So close is the relation between the Sacred Heart of Our Lord and His Kingship over the entire human race that the liturgical celebration of Christ's Kingship may well be regarded as the consummation of the Feast of the Sacred Heart, which is celebrated shortly after Pentecost on the Sunday following the Feast of Corpus Christi. You might say that the devotion to the Sacred Heart, begun in the latter part of the 17th century, culminated in the early part of the twentieth when, in 1925, Pope Pius XI promulgated the feast we celebrate this Sunday: the Feast of Christ the King.

But a cursory reading of the encyclicals of Pope Pius XI shows that he had other reasons for instituting today's feast, reasons that we find being articulated by many of Pius XI's predecessors. Take Pope Leo XIII. In the year 1899, in preparation for the new century, Pope Leo decided to consecrate the entire human race to the Sacred Heart. And to explain the importance of this consecration, Pope Leo wrote the encyclical *Annum Sacrum*, in which he declared that such a worldwide and solemn testimony of allegiance and piety is especially appropriate to Jesus Christ, who is the Head and Supreme Lord of the race. His empire extends not only over Catholic nations and those who, having been duly washed in the waters of holy baptism, belong of right to the Church, although erroneous opinions keep them astray, or dissent from her teaching cuts them off from her care; it comprises also all those who are deprived of the Christian faith, so that the whole human race is most truly under the power of Jesus Christ. . . .

Another reason why Pope Leo XIII had decided to consecrate the entire human race to the Sacred Heart was to foster those conditions which would "establish or draw tighter the bonds which naturally connect public affairs with God . . ." and give "to States a hope of better things." "In these latter times especially," writes the pope, "a policy has been followed which has resulted in a sort of wall being raised between the Church and civil society. In the constitution and administration of States the authority of sacred and divine law is utterly disregarded, with a view to the exclusion of religion from having any constant part in public life. This policy almost tends to the removal of the Christian faith from our midst, and, if that were possible, of the

banishment of God Himself from the earth. When men's minds are raised to such a height of insolent pride, what wonder is it that the greater part of the human race should have fallen into such disquiet of mind and be buffeted by waves so rough that no one is suffered to be free from anxiety and peril? When religion is once discarded it follows of necessity that the surest foundations of the public welfare must give way, whilst God, to inflict on His enemies the punishment they so richly deserve, has left them the prey of their own evil desires, so that they give themselves up to their passions and finally wear themselves out by excess of liberty."

In other words, it is in the rise of secularism and the abandonment of the true religion that the Pope finds the root cause of [and I quote] "that abundance of evils which have now for a long time settled upon the world, and which pressingly call upon us to seek for help from Him by whose strength alone they can be driven away. Who can He be", asks the Pope, "but Jesus Christ the Only-begotten Son of God? 'For there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved' (Acts 4:12)." No other name: not Mohammed, not Buddha, not Abraham. "We must", insists the Pope, "have recourse to Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We have gone astray and we must return to the right path: darkness has overshadowed our minds, and the gloom must be dispelled by the light of truth: death has seized upon us, and we must lay hold of life. It will at length be possible that our many wounds be healed and all justice spring forth again with the hope of restored authority; that the splendors of peace be renewed, and swords and arms drop from the hand when all men shall acknowledge the empire of Christ and willingly obey His word, and 'Every tongue shall confess that our Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father' (Philippians 2:2).

Now bear in mind, that the Pope wrote all of this in the year 1899. But I ask you: Did any nation pay attention? The course of history would suggest that the Pope's message went unheeded. Nine years earlier, the Pope had predicted, even prophesied, that "*The present century has encountered memorable disasters, and it is not certain that some equally terrible are not impending.*" And less than 25 years later, World War I, that Great and Terrible War, broke out and ravaged the last vestiges of Christendom. Was anyone listening afterwards? It seems not. For in 1922, when that carefree decade known as the Roaring Twenties was in the middle of earning its nickname, newly elected Pope Pius XI took the time to write his first encyclical, in which he assesses the state of the world as follows:

One thing is certain today. Since the close of the Great War individuals, the different classes of society, the nations of the earth **have not as yet found true peace**. They do not enjoy, therefore, that active and fruitful tranquility which is the aspiration **and the need** of mankind. This is a sad truth which forces itself upon us from every side.

From a secular perspective, the reign of Pius XI *did* enjoy peace and tranquility, but as far as Pius XI was concerned, it was all an illusion. His papal motto said it all: *Pax Christi in Regno Christi* [The peace of Christ in the reign of Christ]. Nations, however much they supposed themselves to be under the blessing and protection of Almighty God, would never enjoy true peace, the peace of Christ, until they submitted themselves publicly and politically to the reign of Christ. And so, in order to inspire and instill reverence for the Kingship of Christ — at least amongst Catholics — Pius XI instituted today's Feast, and hoped that by so doing, Catholics could, in his words, "minister to the needs of the present day, and at the same time provide an excellent remedy for the plague which now infects society."

There you have it: Pope Pius XI instituted the Feast of Christ the King so that Catholics would become a remedy for "the plague which now infects society." The plague, of course, is secularism, with all of its pernicious errors: the banishment of God and religion from public life, the divorce of Church and State, the exaltation of the individual and the undermining of marriage and family through contraception, abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, divorce, homosexuality, promiscuity, immodesty—the list goes on and on.

Needless to say, the plague of secularism has enjoyed a tremendous measure of success, so much so that those who are infected hardly know it. The plague of secularism, thanks in no small measure to the music

we listen to, the media we watch and read, has clearly infested every nook and cranny of the modern world, including the very precincts of the Catholic Church herself.

What, then, shall we do to fight this plague, regain the upper hand, and become the desired remedy for the world? For starters, what you are doing now is essential. Everyone here, just by being here and entering into the sacred mysteries celebrated here, submits himself, at least externally, to the rule of Christ, the Lamb: “the Lamb that was slain and is worthy to receive power and divinity and wisdom and strength and honor.” By participating in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, you have joined yourselves however unwittingly to the saints in heaven, who even now worship and praise the same “Lamb that was slain.” Some of you, perhaps many of you, have no idea that you are here to give “thanks to God the Father” because He has made you “worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light;” has snatched you “from the power of darkness, and has transferred you into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood”, the blood of His Heart, “the blood of His Cross”. Perhaps some of you are here out of curiosity, perhaps merely to fulfill an obligation. Even so, it’s a start, and a very good one at that.

As traditional Catholics, we ought to go further and ask ourselves, What areas of my life do I need to turn over to the Lordship of Christ? In what areas of my life are my actions inspired more by the spirit of the times (the *zeitgeist*) than by the Spirit of Christ? If you really want to know, go on a retreat and purge the world from your soul. Barring that, avoid all forms of media for a week, even a month, and instead read Sacred Scripture and the Lives of the Saints, and pray. Then you will be able to sense the plague of secularism within yourself.

As you know, we make up the Church militant. We are soldiers in the Army of Christ. Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI, to say nothing of many other popes, have warned us about our enemies. If previous generations ignored these warnings, let us not make the same mistake. We may be outnumbered, but then so was Constantine. He put his trust in the Cross; let us likewise place our trust in Christ Crucified and submit our lives and fortunes to His gentle rule.