

23 NOVEMBER 2025

A Reflection

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SUNDAY OF CHRIST THE KING

Jeremiah 23:1–6; Colossians 1:11–20; Luke 23:33–43

Today is the Feast Day of Christ the King. A day when Christians affirm the primacy of Christ's authority over all other authorities.

The Feast of Christ the King was first instigated in 1925 by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Quas Primas*. It was originally celebrated in October.

The Feast of Christ the King was created in response to a very turbulent period in Europe, following the First WW.

There were all kinds of new 'ism' blowing in the wind, in Europe and Asia including: Nazism, communism, fascism, socialism and of course capitalism. Atheism and secularism and many new philosophies challenged the primacy of Christian faith.

We still have these 'isms' in today's world, only in a more developed form. Communism is still with us as is capitalism. Nazism and fascism have morphed into the White supremacist movements we are seeing throughout the world.

Pius XI wanted to remind Christians that Christ's authority transcends all political powers and that true peace comes only through Christ's reign.

In 1969, after the Second Vatican Council of the RC church, the Feast of Christ the King was moved from October, to where it is now – the last Sunday after Pentecost and Sunday before Advent. This Sunday acts as a pivot between Pentecost Sundays and the Start of Advent.

In the ecumenical climate of the 1960s and 70s many of the mainstream Protestant Churches adopted the Feast of Christ the King. It made sense even to Protestants and it resonated with our shared belief that Christ is King and Head of the Church and Lord of our lives.

Our first two Scripture readings today, describe what kind of king Christ is.

Jeremiah 23:1–6

The first generation of Christians had no other Bible except the Old Testament. They interpreted the Life of Jesus in the light of the Old Testament. They saw in Jesus, the fulfilment of many of the OT scriptures.

In Jeremiah 23 :1-6 the early Church saw the description of the Shepherd-King. A king whose leadership was based on justice and love. And they saw this fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He was, to the early Christians, ‘the long-awaited Shepherd King’. A saviour who cared for all people – especially the vulnerable and the lost.

It is still a wonderful image of the Christ that is still treasured by Christians today. The king who acts as a pastor and shepherd of his people.

It's also an image that is hard to fulfil for those of us involved in the pastoral care of others. But it is the most rewarding of all ministry tasks.

Colossians 1:11-20

In our second reading, Paul presents Jesus as The Cosmic Christ, ‘the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation, the one through whom all things hold together.’

Christ’s reign is not confined to earthly thrones or nations — it is cosmic reign, covering every place in the universe. For Paul, Jesus is the universal Christ who is present everywhere, for everyone.

That image of Christ still resonates with many of us today with our knowledge of the universe and our knowledge of the diversity of the human family.

Christ The King Sunday has become a special time / a special day when we ask ourselves what/who is the greatest authority in our lives?

Is it our Faith? Is it our political beliefs? Is it our cultural beliefs? Is it our secular worldview? Or is it a smorgasbord of beliefs?

What/who is it that shapes our thinking and our actions, the most?

You may be surprised to hear that some studies suggest that many people today, have a smorgasbord of beliefs. (Deborah C. Bowen and contributors – In The Strategic Smorgasbord of Postmodernity (2007),

Instead of choosing a singular source of authority and truth, many people will combine fragments of religion, philosophy, science, and culture into a personal, eclectic system. They may even read their horoscope each day as part of that eclectic belief system. They borrow beliefs from a number of sources.

I would suggest that many of us are in this category. We may not read our horoscopes with any seriousness, but we do believe in chance and the mysterious order in life beyond our control.

We have a core belief that is Christian, but we are still able to absorb other philosophies, scientific theories and the cultural values inherent in our upbringing.

Even the well-known atheist Richard Dawkins called himself a ‘cultural Christian’. He was acknowledging the Christian-influenced British culture he was raised in – even though he doesn’t believe a word of the gospel.

In today’s pluralistic world, some people find the “pick-and-mix” approach to be a liberating alternative to the dogma of institutional Christianity. Dogma, which they can no longer believe in, e.g. the classic three-tiered universe in the scriptures - heaven above, hell below.

Recent surveys show that, for the first time in our history, there are more people in Aotearoa NZ who claim to have ‘no religion’, than those who have a religion.

Despite having no religion, they have still been influenced by Christian culture - many still practice other forms of spirituality including meditation, yoga, indigenous rituals, and environmental ethics.

Most Kiwis I have come across feel a connection to the land, the sea and our beautiful environment. The ‘world’ or the Earth is certainly not an evil place, as some Christian theologies suggests. In fact, it is the only place where we can survive

We often assume that our own way of ‘doing/practising Christianity’ is the purest way of doing it. We are very unobjective and uncritical of the way we practise our beliefs. It’s only when we step into another culture that we become conscious of our own Christian practice.

A few years ago, I went to an infant baptism in a Greek Orthodox church. The baby of a couple I knew. It was different from anything I’d experienced. A two-hour long service and a very detailed liturgy.

The baptism was so symbolic and so spectacular. The naked baby was fully emersed (three times, in the names of the Holy Trinity) in a large container of water. The baby’s eyes, ears, mouth, and limbs were anointed with oil.

And he was finally dressed in a white baptismal gown (signifying ‘putting on the righteousness of Christ’).

The communion bread was the size of small buns. And there was an interval in the service when we could talk freely, get up and move around, and even go outside.

For much of the service – the celebrant priests seemed to be talking to themselves.

Each culture has its own way of worshipping Christ. There is no ‘one ‘way.

The Samoan Church worships in a different way. Many Samoans are surprised when hearing Jesus speaking in English, for the first time.

Many of you will have seen or experienced the lively African American way of doing Christian worship. Every culture is different.

I know that some Christians feel threatened by other religions and by secular ideologies. Some even feel threatened by other Christian denominations. Some denominations even forbid going inside the church of another denomination.

It doesn't have to be the case – especially when we are emersed every day in secular society, or when we travel to countries which have a totally different religion.

When you travel overseas to foreign countries, you are emersed in other cultures. All around you, people are speaking a different language. The food, the clothing, the music, the smells and even the animals might look strange to you, but you still carry in your backpack/pocket/purse a passport that says you are a NZer.

You could think of that analogy and apply it to living in secular society – or visiting other religious beliefs.

In 2019, after the Christchurch Mosque massacres, a group of us from St Columba's visited the Hastings mosque to show our solidarity with the Muslim community. We were made to feel very welcome and took part in a short Muslim service.

Even though we mixed with the Muslim community and even though we are living in a secular world, every Christian has, as it were, an invisible passport in their possession that says, ‘we are Christian above all else’. That passport may even bear the shape of the cross.

Luke 23:33–43

Our gospel lesson today is about the crucifixion of Jesus. One of the central stories of our faith.

In the gospel of Luke, the cross becomes the throne of Christ the King. From the cross Jesus dispenses his grace and forgiveness, not only to the criminal crucified beside him, but to all people, including you and me. Through Christ we receive the mercy and forgiveness of God.

At the beginning of every new year, the Methodists hold a service called a Covenant Service where they pledge their loyalty to God for another year.

The Covenant service serves much the same purpose as Christ the King Sunday. It renews /or affirms the believer's relationship with God.

I'd like to conclude with sharing that Covenant Prayer of John Wesley:

Loving God,

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you wilt, rank me with whom you will.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed for you or laid aside for you,

exalted for you or brought low for you.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

You are mine, and I am yours.

So let it be.

And the covenant which I have made on earth,

let it be ratified in heaven.

Amen.