

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

## Feast of Christ the Universal King

***First reading:*** (Daniel 7.13-14)

*One Like a Son of Man*

This prophecy of Daniel was written in the dark days of the Syrian persecution of Judaism, a couple of centuries before Christ. First, the evil empires that persecuted Judaism are described under the imagery of ravening beasts tearing their prey to pieces. Then comes this altogether different image of a noble human being on whom God confers all power and sovereignty on earth. In the original vision, this human figure is the personification of the Jews, 'the holy ones of the Most High', who will be freed from this persecution and exalted to glory.

In the New Testament, this prophecy is applied to Jesus. He uses the mysterious expression 'Son of Man' to describe his authority on earth to forgive sins and to prescribe rules for Sabbath observance. He uses it also to soften the prophecy of the suffering and death by which he will achieve his final Resurrection. In the final commission of the Risen Christ to his disciples in Matthew, he goes even further: to him has been given all authority both in heaven and on earth, and in this power he sends out his apostles, promising that he will be with them always.

Question:

*Did the man Jesus have something that showed his authority?*

***Second reading:*** (Revelation 1.5-8)

*The Lord of the Churches*

The Book of Revelation opens with a vision of the Risen Christ as Lord. This passage is rich in quotations from the Old Testament, allusions to several passages of the Bible to express the dignity, power and sovereignty that belong to Christ. He is described even in divine terms, the first and last letters of the alphabet signifying that he is the beginning and end of all things, their origin in creation and their goal. He spans the whole extent of time, past, present and future, until he comes again.

More specifically, also in his glorified humanity, Christ is the Lord of the Church, since he has taken the Church to himself, cleansed it, and made it a Kingdom of Priests to serve God. This too is a biblical expression, for Israel is described as a royal priesthood; it will find its fulfillment in the Church. Like the prophecy of Daniel, the Book of Revelation was written in time of persecution, to assure the persecuted faithful that they were safe in the protection of God, whose power would eventually prevail to rescue them and bring them to triumph and security.

Question:

*In what sense is Christ the Lord of the Church?*

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## **Gospel:**

*(John 18.33-37)*

### *Judgment before Pilate*

In some ways, this dreadful scene is part of the climax of John's Passion Narrative. Throughout the narrative, John stresses the ultimate significance of the events, taking the stress off Jesus' suffering and humiliation, and laying it on his triumph. Finally, Jesus will die only when he has completed his mission, and hands over his Spirit to the newly formed Christian community of Mary and the Beloved Disciple.

In this scene, the Jewish authorities have denounced Jesus as claiming to be King of the Jews, not knowing how true that claim is. Jesus declares that his Kingdom is no earthly kingdom, but far more powerful and meaningful. By his statement, he invites Pilate to declare himself for the truth, as any judge should do. Now Pilate three times declares Jesus innocent, but at the same time makes a mockery of himself, as he stands before Truth itself, and asks what is truth. Then he seats Jesus on the Judgement Seat, robed and crowned as a king. Before this Jesus, enthroned as judge and king, the Jewish authorities deny themselves and their faith by declaring, 'We have no king but Caesar.' If God is not king, Judaism has no reason to exist.

## **Question:**

*Why is the Feast of Christ the King put at the end of the Christian year?*

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