

*I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:15-23*

*Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Matthew 25:31-46*

Today is the Feast of Christ the King. This is a relatively new feast day on the church calendar, instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI. Nationalism and secularism were on the rise at the time and nations around the world were jockeying for power. The Church and the faith no longer held the authority they once did. The intent was to refocus and to celebrate the all-embracing authority of Christ. We seem to be in continual need of this reminder.

These days access to information makes everyone an authority, or so we assume. And we both assert and challenge authority more than ever. We have seen all too much of this in the past year. So perhaps there is no better time than now to think about authority and its place in our lives.

The beautiful imagery in the Ephesians text today describes Christ as our authority. I want you to hear it again because it is so beautiful and powerful! Listen to what the Apostle Paul is praying for the Ephesians - He prays "that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come." Can we begin to conceive of such authority and power? Paul could! Do we give Christ this power in our lives?

Kings were the strongest expression of power imaginable for early Christians. In America we have never put much trust in kings, and they are no longer the world powers they once were. What do power and authority look like for us today? For some it might look like being wealthy or being the head of a corporation. For others power and authority look like being the one who makes all the decisions, or the one who sways popular opinion. Holding political office, or a government position can also give a sense of power.

To whom do we give authority? Just who *is* the boss of us? Often trust has a lot to do with it. We would not think of entrusting our surgical procedure to our auto mechanic, yet both surgeon and mechanic have authority in our lives, albeit in differing ways. Doctors, financial advisors, teachers, mentors, and family members – all can hold some authority in our lives. And what about those powers in our lives that control us in negative ways such as pride, an inability to forgive or to admit we were wrong, or fear of failure? All of these things can have enormous power over our lives if we let them. The question is – Do we give Christ authority to rule over all of these other powers in our lives?

In Matthew's gospel Jesus speaks about the Son of Man coming in his glory, and as king he will sit on his throne and separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And we get uncomfortable when we hear this, squirming on our own thrones... because any talk of judgment immediately makes us wonder...are we a sheep or a goat? And another thing that often happens when we are judged is that we immediately turn and judge someone else, because somehow that makes us feel powerful.

Jesus shows us a different model. He does not say that it will be the powerful or those with authority who will inherit the kingdom. No, Jesus invites into the kingdom those with no power or authority saying, "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

Jesus is not trying to scare the disciples with his teaching; he is exhorting them strongly to serve others, to focus again and again on "the least of these" — and in so doing to become a glimpse, a sacrament, an experience, and above all a proclamation of Christ's reign of love and mercy. He reveals a kingdom not of domination, but of humility, of servanthood; not of mockery, but kindness; not of cruelty, but compassion and generosity.

To allow God to be the sole authority in our lives above every earthly power is to claim Christ as King. God's power is immeasurable, put to work in Christ through his death and resurrection. This is power and authority that will transform us and it will transform the world. May Paul's prayer for the Ephesians be a prayer for us. May it inspire us to share the inheritance, and to make visible the power and authority of Christ our King!

It is for this kingdom that the Church waits, and prays, and hopes, and prepares as the season of Advent draws near. Amen.