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Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

[November 24, 2019](#)

2 Samuel 5:1-3

Psalms 122

Colossians 1:12-20

Luke 23:35-43

Christ "is the image of the invisible God." That idea has inspired thousands of representations of Jesus of decidedly wide-ranging degrees of artistic quality.

One of the oldest images we have is a third-century fresco from the catacombs depicting Jesus as a young Good Shepherd. At the other end of the spectrum is a sixth-century Orthodox icon of Christ the "Pantocrator," the all-powerful or all-sustaining One.

A common Latin American image depicts Christ the King robed in purple, crowned with thorns and with his hands tied in front of him. Sadao Watanabe, a Japanese artist, depicted a serene Christ with light streaming from his cross and small figures of a kneeling man and woman praying on either side of him.

Most crucifixes place the INRI scroll above Jesus' head, reminding us that he was executed as "Jesus Christ, King of the Jews."

An internet search for images of Christ the King adds pictures that look very much like St. Louis, king of France — and many more. If we take them seriously, true icons lead us to contemplate the mystery of Christ, and others may trivialize him or even seem heretical.

Most images reflect the time and culture in which they were created. They may divinize their own values by depicting Christ as just like themselves, or they might be world-rejecting and portray him as ahistorical or so angelic that no human could hope to imitate him. Each artwork depicts a particular Christology or interpretation of who Christ is.

So, too, our hymns and even the layout of our churches communicate an understanding of our relationship to God. All of these things both express and shape our deep, implicit theology, the beliefs that motivate us long before we articulate them clearly.

What do we celebrate on this last Sunday of the church year? The feast called the Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe is less than a century old, a very recent addition in light of our 2,000-year history. Pope Pius XI said he established this feast in 1925 to combat the rise of secularism and nationalism. Although the name sounds ostentatious, the readings convey a distinctly different tone.

Luke's Gospel doesn't refer to Jesus as a king until the time of his passion. Then Luke tells us that when Jesus made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the crowd on that day cried out, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" and soon thereafter shouted, "Crucify him!" Jesus avoided claiming the designation for himself when Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" At the crucifixion, his executioners turned the title into a way to mock him.

Luke's way of using the term indicates that if we want to think of Christ as a king, we must allow Jesus' own actions to define the meaning of his kingship.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus exercises his sovereignty by pardoning his persecutors and offering a place in his kingdom to a condemned criminal. He demonstrates his intimate relationship with God through the filial obedience of saying, "Not my will, but yours be done." Jesus exhibited his invincibility by accepting death with unshakable faith in the Father's power to give life.

In other words, Jesus lived up to the title placed over his head by redefining kingship, revealing what it looks like in the divine realm rather than in the world of politics and power.

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As we celebrate this feast, the readings prod us to examine how seriously we want to take it. Paul not only called Christ the image of the invisible God, but also said that God has made us fit to participate in his kingdom. It is our choice. Jesus' life reveals that obedience is the way to share in divine life. Jesus' practice of forgiveness shows us how to live in true freedom. His passion and death reveal what God's power is like. Christ the King offers us a model of grace, liberty and unfathomable love.

Christian art is graphic theology. The Christian community makes theology experiential. The life of the baptized can never be neutral. We who pray, "Thy kingdom come," are always presenting an image of Christ to the world.

Our history is replete with heretical dominating images that mirror the power structures of our world. Our call is to create communities that provide true icons of Christ's kingship expressed through the grace of God's reconciling love and life-giving power.

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