

As a child, I always thought it would be more interesting if our nation had a king. Fables and great stories spoke of kings, not presidents. But I learned how the founders of this nation rejected the authority of England's King George III and had no intention of crowning George Washington.

But still, tend to be intrigued by royalty. Think of the overwhelming tabloid attention that Prince William and Kate Middleton, as we had with Prince Charles and Princess Diana. Perhaps it's our nostalgia for a bygone era.

In the fallout that followed World War I, the power structures in our world were changing. The world's kings and queens, czars and Kaisers were toppling over one by one. Seeing this movement toward something new, Pope Pius XI was inspired to establish *the Solemnity of Christ the King*. And he believed a yearly liturgical celebration would be more effective than merely issuing a doctrinal declaration, because while an issued statement from the Vatican reaches a limited few, the Church's feasts engage all who fill the pews. While doctrine tends to engage the mind, liturgical celebrations engage both the mind and the heart.

And so today in this Mass, and every Mass for that matter, we declare Jesus Christ to be our King: he entered this space, held aloft, in his Holy Word, the Book of the Gospels. Then we stood for the Alleluia, and from the ambo, Christ our King addressed us, citizens of his Kingdom. We will kneel before him as he is present at this altar, and receive his blessing, just before we are sent from this place to declare his Kingdom come.

How do we balance our realities in which we live? How do we live responsibly in the earthly kingdom and yet remain faithful subjects of Christ the King? In every age, men and women have found themselves in this tension: some, perhaps because the Kingdom of Heaven can seem so other-worldly, out of grasp, so little to do with my day-to-day existence, and others because they fear the consequences of being a follower of Jesus. But in every age, there have been others who choose to die for this King and his Kingdom.

One such person was a priest whose feast day occurred yesterday: Blessed Miguel Pro. He lived not so long ago and not so far away, a time and place in which the highly anti-Catholic president of Mexico, Plutarco Calles, enforced a new constitution that would render illegal so many of the regular practices of the Christian faithful. It resulted in war. From 1926 to 1934 thousands of Christians lost their lives.

Fr. Pro was among those who refused to deny that he was foremost a citizen of the Kingdom of God. He continued to serve the Church—which existed underground—responding to the needs of the poor, teaching the faith, performing baptisms and marriages, living as a fugitive of the Mexican authorities, until eventually he was arrested and sentenced to death.

President Calles wanted his execution to be photographed and widely publicized as a way of striking fear into Christians. On November 23, 1927, Fr. Pro was taken to the firing range where he requested two things: to have a few minutes of prayer and to not be blindfolded, so that he could face his executioners. As the guns were pointed toward him, he raised and outstretched his arms, resembling the image of his crucified King, uttering aloud his last words, “Viva Cristo Rey!”

Unlike Pontius Pilate of the first century or President Calles of the 20th, Jesus is a different type of ruler. His was and is a different type of kingdom. As he told Pilate, “My kingdom does not belong to this world”. Jesus is not merely a wisdom teacher, a moral teacher or miracle worker. He is all that, but more. He is God: yet he suffered, he died, but then was resurrected to new life, and has ascended into heaven, where he remains forever Christ our King. His rule is not marked by fear or worldly power, but instead by love and sacrifice. *He did not and would not kill for the truth but instead died for it. He was victorious, not by spilling the blood of others, but by offering his own.*¹

And his is a Kingdom that begins in my heart and your heart, so that then it can exist in your home, and in all the ways you touch society. *Long live Christ our King* who turns fear, hatred, disorder, and distrust—all of it, into love. *Long live Christ the King* who will transform hunger, death, loneliness, division, and our disordered to desires—all of it, into something beautiful. “...for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.”

¹ All Things Made New by Harold A. Buetow (p260). Society of St. Paul Publishing.