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## Introduction

According to the liturgical calendar for the “Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite,” the Universal Church celebrates the Feast of Christ the King, (more formally known as the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe) on the last Sunday of Ordinary Time, the week before the start of Advent. (On the traditional liturgical calendar, the Feast is celebrated on the date proscribed by Pope Pius XI, the last Sunday of October.)

This feast is a relatively recent one, instituted less than one hundred year ago by Pope Pius XI in 1925 with the promulgation of the Encyclical, *Quas Primas*.

The immediate circumstances facing the Holy Father as he wrote were outlined in some detail in the first Encyclical of his pontificate, given some three years prior, *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio* – *On the Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ*.

In it, the Holy Father gave a sober account of the imperiled state of the human family and the “sad conditions” that he observed in the world as he wrote, saying, “Since the close of the Great War [World War I], individuals, the different classes of society, the nations of the earth have not as yet found true peace. They do not enjoy, therefore, that active and fruitful tranquility which is the aspiration and the need of mankind” (*Ubi Arcano* – 7).

The underlying malady, according to His Holiness, was a spiritual one, made manifest in the temporal order through an increasingly secularized society.

“The sensual man - he who, as the Apostle says, does not perceive ‘the things that are of the Spirit of God’ (I *Cor.* ii, 14), yet which cannot but be judged the greatest and most destructive scourges of the social order of today. We refer specifically to those evils which transcend the material or natural sphere and lie within the supernatural and religious order properly so-called; in other words, those evils which affect the spiritual life of souls. These evils are all the more to be deplored since they injure souls whose value is infinitely greater than that of any merely material object” (cf *Ubi Arcano* – 16).

In *Quas Primas*, the Holy Father proposed the establishment of the Feast of Christ the King, not as the solution in and of itself, but as a means of pointing the way to the “remedy for the plague which now infects society” by drawing man’s awareness to the reality that his suffering at the hands of evil is “due to the fact that the majority of men had thrust Jesus Christ and his holy law out of their lives; that these had no place either in private affairs or in politics” (*Quas Primas* - 1).



The relegation of Christ’s authority and influence (as expressed by Divine right by the Holy Roman Catholic Church) to the periphery was nothing new; rather was it an effrontery centuries in the making – from the Protestant revolt and the French Revolution, to the rise of pluralistic democracies and the decline of Catholic Monarchies. Neither was it a novel idea to proclaim faithful submission to the reign of Jesus Christ, our Sovereign and Lord, as the answer, for the predecessors of Pope Pius XI had often taught the very same doctrine.

Even so, it can be said with confidence that Pope Pius XI was a man of great vision, who saw in this terrible regression of civilization throughout human history a pressing need to call him, with all the more fervor, to assemble beneath the banner of Christ the King, to proclaim and promote His Sovereign rights and prerogatives, and to make known the duty incumbent upon all individuals and nations to serve Him.

According to the Holy Father, it is only in “the sweet and saving yoke” of our Lord that the hope of shedding the increasingly onerous burden of individualism, secularism and statism lies; for “as long as individuals and states refused to submit to the rule of our Savior, there would be no really hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations [nor among men]” (ibid.).

By establishing the Feast of Christ the King rather than simply reiterating the Church’s sure doctrine concerning the Sovereign rights of Our Lord by way of proclamation, the Holy Father was seeking to draw upon the unique power of the sacred liturgy; a font from which the entire man is inundated – body, mind, intellect, will and senses – with the saving truth of God, increasing the zeal and “the inner joys of religion” in all of the faithful, citing the ancient axiom, “*Legem credendi lex statuit supplicandi*: The rule of faith is indicated by the law of our worship.”

As for the more detailed instruction that is ever necessary in arming God’s people for battle against His adversaries, the Holy Father said:

“This matter is so dear to Our heart, Venerable Brethren, that I would wish to address to you a few words concerning it. It will be for you later to explain in a manner suited to the understanding of the faithful what We are about to say concerning the Kingship of Christ, so that the annual feast which We shall decree may be attended with much fruit and produce beneficial results in the future” (*Quas Primas* – 6).

It is noteworthy that the Holy Father’s liturgical approach to the problem of secularization was not motivated exclusively by spiritual concerns, but by practical ones as well.

As he wrote in 1925, the state of communications was not nearly as efficient as it is today. Papal pronouncements, the pope noted, “usually reach only a few and the more learned among the faithful; feasts reach them all; the former speak but once, the latter speak every year - in fact, forever” (*Quas Primas* - 21).

The Holy Father, one can be certain, was keenly aware that the problem of secularization had neither arrived on the scene overnight, nor would it be

defeated without great effort; rather, his plan of attack in establishing this most excellent Feast was clearly intended for the long haul, “in fact,” as he stated, “*forever*.”



Pope Pius XI

So, where do we find ourselves in the present day?

Sure, the Universal Church continues to annually celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, and yet the “beneficial results” envisioned by the Holy Father have not been realized. Indeed, one observes that the exact opposite has been the case!

If we’re honest, we must admit that this is due in large measure to the fact that the enduring doctrine of the Church concerning the Sovereign rights of Jesus Christ in society is rarely, if ever, the subject of modern day catechesis, be it from our parish priests, our local ordinaries, our nation’s episcopal conference, or even the Holy See.

While it is easy to point fingers at the successors of the “Venerable Brethren” who were charged by the Holy Father with the solemn obligation of increasing the faithful’s awareness of Christ’s Kingship, doing so is at best a dereliction of our own duty, and at worst, it is an invitation to even further discord.

Unlike Pope Pius XI and his contemporaries, we live in an “information age” wherein faith formation materials (such as the guide in your hands) are readily available, as are the contents of the papal archives, catechisms and councils. It is up to each and every one of us to take responsibility for growing in our understanding of the Sovereign rights of Our Lord, defending the same at every turn while tirelessly inviting others to do the same.

This is our duty; a duty that presses upon us ever more urgently with every passing day.

The secularists among us - both progressive and conservative alike - cannot help but experience and lament the degradation of society just as we do, but they are moved to fruitlessly seek relief in political platforms and social causes, constitutions and congresses, a path that inevitably leads to little more than disappointment and despair.

As for us, we will place our hope in neither man nor movement, but will boldly raise the banner of Christ the King, resisting the temptation to discouragement in the face of the blessed persecution that awaits us, all the while taking comfort in the words of Pope Pius XI who said:

“We may well admire in this the admirable wisdom of the Providence of God, who, ever bringing good out of evil, has from time to time suffered the faith and piety of men to grow weak, and allowed Catholic truth to be attacked by false doctrines, but always with the result that truth has afterwards shone out with greater splendor, and that men's faith, aroused from its lethargy, has shown itself more vigorous than before” (*Quas Primas* - 22).

*Deo Gratias!*



Image of Pope Pius XI upon the *Sedia Gestatoria*, a portable ceremonial throne used by the Holy Fathers until the year 1978 when it was abandoned under the pontificate of Pope Paul VI.



Almighty and everlasting God, who in Thy beloved Son, the King of the whole world, hast willed to restore all things, mercifully grant that all the families of nations now kept apart by the wound of sin, may be brought under the sweet yoke of His rule.

Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, world without end.  
Amen.

Collect for the Feast of Christ the King  
*Missale Romanum - 1962*