

Notes from the Liturgist

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Christ the King

The last Sunday of Ordinary Time or the Last Sunday of the Year as it is sometimes referred to, is designated as the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. It is one of the solemnities of the Lord during Ordinary Time which are listed in the Roman Missal. The others are: The First Sunday after Pentecost which is the solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity; The Sunday after the Most Holy Trinity which is the Solemnity of Corpus Christi; and the Friday after the second Sunday after Pentecost which is the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The Feast was instituted on 11 December in 1925 by Pope Pius XI and was allocated in the pre-Vatican II calendar to the last Sunday in October. The purpose of the feast is to renew in the minds and hearts of the faithful the ancient concept of Christ as divine king who, enthroned at the right hand of the Father, will return at the end of time in might and majesty. It is true that in the liturgy's sacred sanctuary this concept of Christ and his kingship have never lost luster, as it accompanies us through the Church's year of grace.

Pope Pius XI instituted the feast with an encyclical entitled *Quam Primas* addressed to the bishops of the world. In the encyclical he says: "It is not necessary, Venerable Brethren, that We should explain to you at any length why We have decreed that this feast of the Kingship of Christ should be observed in addition to those other feasts in which his kingly dignity is already signified and celebrated. It will suffice to remark that although in all the feasts of our Lord the material object of worship is Christ, nevertheless their formal object is something quite distinct from his royal title and dignity. We have commanded its observance on a Sunday in order that not only the clergy may perform their duty by saying Mass and reciting the Office, but that the laity too, free from their daily tasks, may in a spirit of holy joy give ample testimony of their obedience and subjection to Christ. The last Sunday of October seemed the most convenient of all for this purpose, because it is at the end of the liturgical year, and thus the feast of the Kingship of Christ sets the crowning glory upon the mysteries of the life of Christ already commemorated during the year, and, before celebrating the triumph of all the Saints, we proclaim and extol the glory of him who triumphs in all the Saints and in all the Elect. Make it your duty and your task, Venerable Brethren, to see that sermons are preached to the people in every parish to teach them the meaning and the importance of this feast, that they may so order their lives as to be worthy of faithful and obedient subjects of the Divine King".

The title of the feast was "Domini Nostri Jesu Christi Regis" (Our Lord Jesus Christ the King), and the date was established as "the last Sunday of the month of October – the Sunday, that is, which immediately precedes the Feast of All Saints".[5] In Pope St. John XXIII's revision of the Calendar in 1960, the date and title were unchanged but, according to the simplification of the ranking of feasts, it was classified as a feast of the first class.

In his *motu proprio* *Mysterii Paschalis* of 1969, Bl. Pope Paul VI amended the title of the Feast to "D. N. Iesu Christi universorum Regis" (Our Lord Jesus Christ King of the Universe). He also moved it to the new date of the final Sunday of the liturgical year, before the commencement of a new liturgical year on the

First Sunday of Advent (the earliest date for which is 27 November). Through this choice of date "the eschatological importance of this Sunday is made clearer".[6] He assigned to it the highest rank of "solemnity".[7]

– ACE TUPASI