

Cristo Rey

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SOUNDING BOARD

Cristo Rey

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"As long as individuals and states refuse to submit to the rule of our Savior, there can be no really hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations."—Pius XI, 1925

MANILA, Philippines - If it is relevant enough for Wikipedia which does not profess to be a religious mouthpiece, yesterday's feast should have a place in the column of one who puts S.J. after his name. Hence a word about Christ the King whose Solemnity the Christian world celebrated yesterday, Sunday.

Perhaps the most celebrated royal leader in our day is Queen Elizabeth of England. Her office might be largely symbolic but she still wields tremendous clout. Consider her titles. She is Queen Elizabeth II by the Grace of God, Queen of this Realm and of Her Other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith.

But that is nothing compared to the royalty whose feast we celebrated yesterday. Jesus is King by the Grace of God, Shepherd of the People and Commander of Israel, God's Beloved Son, the Image of the Invisible God, Lord of Lords, King of Kings, the Firstborn of all Creation, Head of the Church, and Firstborn of the Dead. And these do not say everything.

But first let us recall the origin of the feast. It was Pope Pius XI who started it in 1925 through his encyclical Quas Primas. Why was Pius XI inspired to establish the feast? He put it this way:

"In the first Encyclical Letter which We addressed at the beginning of Our Pontificate to the Bishops of the universal Church, We referred to the chief causes of the difficulties under which mankind was laboring. And We remember saying that these manifold evils in the world were 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: and We said further, that 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."

The memorable line is: "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."

Even today the warning of Pius XI still rings true.

But the same warning was given centuries ago by Jesus Christ himself. Last Thursday the gospel reading was about Jesus Christ weeping as he entered Jerusalem. He then warned:

"If this day you only knew what makes for peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. For the days are coming upon you when your enemies will raise a palisade against you; they will encircle you and hem you in on all sides. They will smash you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another within you because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."

Jesus predicted then that Jerusalem would be destroyed because the city, and especially its leaders, had become spiritually bankrupt and morally corrupt and had relied instead on political alliances and intrigues for the salvation of the city. It broke the heart of Christ. So he wept.

This was also what Pius XI saw in 1925 when he rallied the Christian world to honor Christ the King and to live by his teachings. The dire warning was "that 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."

The events that followed in the 20th century—destructive wars and manmade calamities—verified what Pius XI had warned about.

The warning should give us pause. We may not have invented corruption and injustice but we have perfected them. Even as we await final report of the World Bank and of never-ending legislative investigations, the verdict on amparo

petitions and the results of peace negotiations, we must ask ourselves: Have we really accepted Christ as our King? As Pius XI put it: "As individuals and as states [we have] refused to submit to the rule of our Savior."

The feast of Christ the King reminds me of the Mexican Jesuit martyr Blessed Miguel Pro whose feast was commemorated last Friday. Fr. Miguel Pro died during the height of political terror against the Catholic Church. Under threat of persecution, torture, arrest and even death, priests were prohibited from administering communion, baptism, confession, confirmation and marriage. It was under this regime that Father Pro worked and met his death. As the firing squad raised its weapons, Father Pro, on Nov. 23, 1927, in a clear and loud voice shouted, Viva Cristo Rey!

On this last week of the liturgical year, we as individuals and as a nation are given an opportunity to recommit ourselves to Christ the King. Unless we do so, we are assured that there can be "no really hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations."