

CONCLUSION OF THE YEAR OF FAITH 2012-2013

SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE KING | November 24, 2013

No one likes to be told what to do. People tolerate it, put up with it, endure it but there seems to be something engrained in the fabric of our being that resists and resents being told what to do by another human being. That's understandable enough; after all, we say that we have been created with an intellect and free will. Shouldn't we be able to figure things out for ourselves? Why do we need someone else directing our lives and our actions? What about God? Does it bother us when God tells us what to do? I mean, after all, God created us. Doesn't God have some privileges and prerogatives with regard to his creation? Doesn't God have some proprietary rights over us? When we resist and resent him, when we chose not to follow his will for us, we call it sin. What about the Church? More than resisting and resenting God, we really find it hard to take when the Church "gets all up in our business." God is one thing but a group of human beings who think they know more, no better than me? It is not uncommon to find that people --- that you and I --- sometimes have difficulty accepting authority. And, yet, authority is as much a part of our human lives and experience as just about anything else. Why is that? I dare say because authority is necessary.

In addition to creatures possessed of an intellect and free will, human are defined as social beings. The need for others, to be with others, to share our lives with others is right there in our human make-up. After all, we believe that we are created by God in his image and God is a trinity, a Blessed Trinity, a community of persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But, in God, there is complete and total perfection. Not so with us, made in his image but diminished by sin, freely chosen and willed. Back to authority.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us

1897 "Human society can be neither well-ordered nor prosperous unless it has some people invested with legitimate authority to preserve its institutions and to devote themselves as far as is necessary to work and care for the good of all." By "authority" one means the quality by virtue of which persons or institutions make laws and give orders to men and expect obedience from them.

1898 Every human community needs an authority to govern it.¹⁶ The foundation of such authority lies in human nature. It is necessary for the unity of the state. Its role is to ensure as far as possible the common good of the society.

1899 The authority required by the moral order derives from God ...

1902 Authority does not derive its moral legitimacy from itself ... (and) must act for the common good as a "moral force based on freedom and a sense of responsibility."

1903 Authority is exercised legitimately only when it seeks the common good of the group concerned ...

Today, we as Catholics celebrate with the Church throughout the world the authority that belongs to Christ the King and that he, in turn, has shared with the Church he founded when he proclaimed “You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church ... whose sins you shall forgive are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain are retained (Matthew 16: 18-19).” Christ the King could give such authority because he, alone, possessed it as God, the author of the universe and all it contained. The word itself contains the word “author” and that is the what and why of authority.

Our readings today give us insight into this reality we call authority. The Book of Samuel describes how David became King of Israel, an earthly king designated by God for authority in an earthly kingdom. The Letter to the Colossians relates how God the Father delivered his people “from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his Beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” And St. Luke’s Gospel demonstrates the true nature of authority in the Kingdom of God, an authority that led the Christ the King not to any throne or royal palace but, rather, to the wood of the cross where he would suffer and die so that the Father might forgive us for what we do ... knowingly and unknowingly. And there, “at the place called the Skull,” we glimpse the true purpose and meaning of authority: forgiveness and love for others, a love unto death. St. Paul writes elsewhere in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, “For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God’s power we will live with him to serve you.” Power and authority are for service because power and authority come only from a God, from the Lord Jesus who, though God, emptied himself (Philippian 2: 6); who, though God, “came to serve and not be served and to give his life (Mark 10: 45).”

Today is, indeed, a great feast in the Church when we recognize the kind of King we have in Christ Jesus and what he asks of us, his subjects. Today is also the day when we bring the “Year of Faith” to a close. Throughout the past year, our Church has had the opportunity, as our Holy Father said at its initial proclamation not only to grow in faith but also “to intensify the witness of charity.” The Pope reflected, “Faith without charity bears no fruit, while charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt. Faith and charity each require the other, in such a way that each allows the other to set out along its respective path.”

“We walk by faith but not by sight (2 Corinthians 5: 7).” May the Lord Jesus Christ Our King strengthen that faith as he continues to lead us all in love on our journey to his eternal Kingdom. Amen.