

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD ...

Sermon, November 22, 2020

Christ the King Sunday

Texts: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Matthew 25:31-46

In the devotional during our November 11 Hymn Sing, I made the observation that when we pray that petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," we aren't just praying for general nourishment alone. We are praying for all kinds of related concerns! We are praying for all involved in bringing bread, sustenance, to our individual tables and the tables of others. When we pray "Give us this day our daily bread," by inference we are praying for our community, our state, our place of employment, our nation, our representatives, our President ...and in this global economy of today we are praying for world heads of state, for business leaders, for the moral and spiritual health of countless millions who make up a society ... all of which enables our "daily bread" to get to the table.

People won't get bread on their plate unless there are good roads, unless there are farmers and harvesters and bakers and packagers and truck drivers and stores AND unless they have means of income and job security, under the protection and administration of a benevolent government that is stable, moral and TRUSTWORTHY ... and ultimately, unless there are enough ethical, honest, honorable, trustworthy, and diligent citizens and government officials to establish and preserve and maintain order once order is established. Honorable people of integrity help undergird the entire infrastructure that enables food to get to our plates; it just doesn't magically appear. If that support chain of food production and distribution is disrupted, bread won't get to our table. Daily bread becomes an absolute luxury and rarity whenever government breaks down. We got just a wee taste of this in this pandemic; never before in my entire adult life had I been unable to purchase toilet paper! And eventually we started seeing the disappearance of much more important items from the store shelves ... e.g., fresh beef, eggs, poultry ... all because of the disruption of supply chains and people's propensity to panic. Cattle were being slaughtered and buried (*or burned*), eggs by the thousands were discarded, dairy products were poured down massive drains, all because complex distribution systems were being disrupted and products could not get to the stores (*and when some products did, people overbought and hoarded*) ... "our daily bread" was becoming endangered, and this is not to mention the untold thousands who lost household income due to shutdown of "non-essential" businesses.

I remember reading as a college kid in the seventies (*and I can't footnote this reference as I'm going by distant memory*) that the climate, size and geographical conditions of the nation of Ethiopia and the state of California were nearly identical. If California were a sovereign nation at the time, it would have had the world's seventh largest economy; meanwhile, however, Ethiopians were dying of starvation by the thousands. Ample food should have been able to be produced in Ethiopia, but things were too chaotic with the corruption, the civil wars, the upheaval ... and even when food was donated by aid agencies, it couldn't get through to those who needed it. I could cite dozens of other similar examples, but just one more for now: In the early twentieth century, the fertile and productive Ukraine was known as the breadbasket of Europe; but the early 1930s saw what was called the **Holodomor**, the famine genocide ... a man-made famine under the cruel hand of Josef Stalin, and that lack of "our daily bread" led to the death of millions of Ukrainians by starvation and disease; it was a clear case of death by government.

Simply put, if we are to continue enjoying "our daily bread," if we are to survive as a democratic republic, our society needs men and women of faith, integrity, honor and virtue, men and women who hold to the principles of the Living Bread Jesus Christ, or, to mix my liturgical metaphors for today, men and women who are subjects of **Christ the King**.

Some of you may remember Christ the King Sunday was first established in 1925 by Pope Pius XI. In that same year 1925 in Italy, Benito Mussolini had just claimed the title, "Il Duce", declaring himself dictator and was pursuing his fascist program designed to recapture for Italy the glory that had been ancient Rome's (*hint for those who don't know ... it didn't work: Italy was plunged into chaos*). In the year 1925 in Germany, Adolf Hitler's manifesto *Mein Kampf* was widely distributed throughout the German nation, and National Socialism was on the rise (*little historical trivia for you: the original title of Mein Kampf ... in English, My Struggle ... was a somewhat less catchy Four and a Half Years of Struggle against Lies, Stupidity, and Cowardice*). In that same year 1925 in the nation of Russia, Lenin had died and Trotsky was exiled, and the aforementioned Josef Stalin was in full power establishing the Communist "utopia" of the Soviet Union. This was the same Josef Stalin who seven years later caused the Holodomor. And the same Stalin who is famously quoted as saying, "*Those who cast votes decide nothing. Those who count votes decide everything.*"

Way back on Nov 18, 2012, I said from this pulpit, "*There is much talk in these weeks following the recent election about calling for a recount, especially in areas like St. Lucie County in Florida which turned out an amazing 141.1% of the vote ... out of 175,554 registered voters, 247,713 votes were cast! I'm hoping for a similar return on our pledge cards!*" Lately some are citing evidence that some voting districts in several states, not just Florida, are turning out 155%, 200% and even 300% of registered voters in those districts, and the current election remains an unsettled matter. I won't give any political

commentary on that other than to encourage us to pray, and to repeat what I said in 2012 (*and again in November 2018, for that matter*) ... I would like to point out the month of November DOES have an annual holiday which calls for a recount, but it shouldn't be Election Day! THANKSGIVING is that November holiday we are called to count and recount our **blessings!** *"Count your blessings, name them one by one, Count your blessings, see what God has done! Count your blessings, name them one by one, Count your many blessings, see what God has done."* And thank God for those blessings ... including the huge blessing of your daily bread. Anyway, BACK TO 1925. It was in that year 1925 that George Bernard Shaw was compelled to write: *"If the other planets are inhabited, they must be using the earth as their insane asylum."* It was into that tumultuous political climate of 1925 that Pope Pius XI sent his encyclical *Quas Primas*, which established the commemoration of Christ the King Sunday we celebrate today. More on that in a minute.

You may not know this, as we didn't see much, if anything, about it in the news, but we marked a monumental anniversary this month. **November 11, 2020** marked the 400th anniversary of the signing of the **Mayflower Compact**. The Mayflower had left England September 16, 1620; the brave Puritans aboard were soberly aware of the potential hardships they would face on their journey. They knew it was a risky journey ... their risk of leaving their homes was somewhat less than the 95-99% survival rates we face with our current plague. It was well known that the only other English settlement in America, Jamestown, had lost hundreds to disease and starvation. The Pilgrims knew they might not survive, they knew the odds were dangerous, but they were determined to find a place where they and their children could worship freely, and a place where they and their children could live well, freely and in peace in accordance with the will of their God. It was worth the risk. The Mayflower dropped anchor at the tip of Cape Cod November 11, 1620. Before heading ashore, forty-one male passengers signed this document called the **Mayflower Compact**. The Mayflower Compact was a voluntary and binding covenant, recognizing the principle of self-government under the Lordship of Christ, with far-reaching economic, religious, and legal implications for all of society. November 11, 2020 was the 400th anniversary of the signing of that pact, that covenant, that agreement (*I understand all kinds of events had been planned in Plymouth in commemoration of this quadracentennial, but were scrapped due to Covid restrictions*). What was signed on that date in 1620 forty or so miles from here would establish the American precedent of free people choosing **by their sacred honor** to self govern, covenanting to maintain a "civil body politic" of self-government under God as their ultimate King. They were trusting in each other to be people of their word and sacred honor, with God as their witness; in self-government, trust, honor, integrity are all so hugely important to establishing and maintaining civil order. It would culminate in the halls of Philadelphia in the 1780s with the formulation of the United States Constitution. It was a year later, November 1621, that the 53 surviving settlers hosted a harvest feast, inviting Chief Massasoit and ninety of his men. A community feast, with local natives who had just endured a destructive deadly plague of their own ... rather than socially distance from them, they celebrated a three day feast of wild turkeys, fish, waterfowl and produce ... and lots of venison; five deer provided by Massasoit himself. Just as a related personal aside, I find it a little ironic that we're commemorating that grand thanksgiving and birth of a free nation by staying in our homes, avoiding social contact, not venturing out into the world beyond the boundaries of our state, and not eating our Thanksgiving meal with anybody but those of our immediate household ... but it is what it is. Personally, I find this all so very difficult ... it would seem the land of the free and home of the brave is becoming the land of the locked down and home of the terrified. Commemorating this holiday with those in my immediate household limits me to having Thanksgiving with my cats.

Daniel Webster, speaking at Plymouth Rock two hundred years ago at the celebration of the Bicentennial of this landing at that site and the subsequent signing of the Compact, said these words which we might do well to commit to memory: *"We have come to this Rock, to record here our homage for our Pilgrim Fathers; our sympathy in their sufferings; our gratitude for their labors; our admiration of their virtues; our veneration for their piety; and our attachment to those principles of civil and religious liberty, which they encountered the dangers of the ocean, the storms of heaven, the violence of savages, disease, exile, and famine, to enjoy and to establish. And we would leave here, also, for the generations which are rising up rapidly to fill our places, some proof that we have endeavored to transmit this great inheritance unimpaired ... that in our estimate of public principles and private virtue, in our veneration of religion and piety, in our devotion to civil and religious liberty, in our regard for whatever advances human knowledge or improves human happiness, we are not altogether unworthy of our origin."*¹

Back to 1925 ... as Pius XI witnessed the rise of these dictators, he was dismayed by how many Christians were being taken in by these tyrants, these self serving earthly leaders with their grand designs and lofty utopian promises who were actually leading their people to destruction and chaos. He wrote in paragraph 19 of *Quas Primas*: *"When once men recognize, both in private and in public life, that Christ is King, [then and only then will] society at last receive the great blessings of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony."* (*Which includes our daily bread.*) That's the original vision of Christ the King Sunday. Is Jesus Christ our King? If so, good! Let's do our level best to *demonstrate* it. If Christ is our King, that means we openly, consistently, visibly and honorably serve Him wherever and however we can and endeavor to be people of integrity, truth and honor, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

¹ Two excellent related articles: <https://stream.org/on-its-400th-anniversary-why-the-mayflower-matters> and https://www.chroniclesmagazine.org/blog/america-s-forgotten-400th-anniversary/?fbclid=IwAR0TnDzAHgC-CfxFk-hwTPAXYdVLpiXWIJzqvHo4eaZruLcJyq3yUS_RKjM

(The following ending was edited out due to time constraints, I include it here) "And now, just a very quick glance at the two lectionary readings for Christ the King Sunday: In the Old Testament, the context is the prophet Ezekiel has announced God's judgment on Israel's kings. Called to be shepherds of the people, they have abused their privileges, misused their power, had not acknowledged God as King, took care of themselves and not the people in their charge, and the people have suffered for it. The prophet promises a time when God Himself will come to be the people's shepherd. He will come from the house of David, the king Israel knew in her days of glory. This King will be first and foremost a shepherd, One who gives himself to the care and nurture and well-being of His people. And in our New Testament reading from Matthew this very same King, the one prophesied in Ezekiel, calls His people to do likewise, to give themselves to the care and nurture and well-being of His people. Jesus insinuates that any form of service to another in need is seen as service to the King Himself. Have you attended to the needs of those who are in need: the lost, the bereaved, the lonely, the naked, the sick and hungry (*and, by the way, these categories include all of us as some time or another!*)? In the words of Mother Theresa, "*We who meditate upon Jesus must then go out and look for Him in disguise.*" The warning here in Matthew is that it is possible to know about Jesus, believe in Jesus, yet not serve Him as your King ... and that just won't do. The point, of course, is both to know Him and serve Him, to make Him our King, and live out our private and public lives accordingly ... living honorably, confidently, sacrificially, securely and faithfully under God and in community with each other with thanksgiving to God for his benevolent and gracious provision. And for the record, our King can be found AND served wherever there is someone in need of a savior.

Let's join together in a litany of Thanksgiving.



A THANKSGIVING LITANY

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

FROM THE RISING OF THE SUN TO ITS SETTING, MY NAME IS GREAT
AMONG THE NATIONS, SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS.

Praise the Lord.

THE NAME OF THE LORD BE PRAISED.

Let us pray: With hearts full of appreciation because of Your goodness, O God, and with thanksgiving in our souls for Your boundless grace and mercies,

WE PREPARE TO CELEBRATE THIS SEASON OF THANKSGIVING, JOINING
ALL THE FAITHFUL OF OUR NATION IN GRATITUDE AND PRAISE.

Throughout the year You have opened Your hands and poured out upon us blessing after blessing.

YOU HAVE PROVIDED US WITH ALL WE NEED TO SUSTAIN BODY AND
SOUL. YOU HAVE BLOTTED OUT ALL OUR SIN, CLEANSED OUR
CONSCIENCES FROM GUILT, AND SPOKEN PEACE TO OUR HEARTS.

Richly and abundantly You have offered to us Word and Sacrament, that our souls may be healed, our faith strengthened, our lives directed.

ACCEPT THE THANKS AND PRAISE OF OUR GRATEFUL HEARTS. WE
SING OF YOUR GOODNESS, WE PROCLAIM YOUR GLORY, AND WE CRY
OUT WITH JOY BECAUSE OF YOUR MERCIES.

Let our thanksgiving, O Lord, move us beyond words into action. May we be instruments of Your grace and vehicles of Your blessing to the needy, the lost, the lonely, and the oppressed.

GIVE US THE GRACE AND STRENGTH TO LIVE FRUITFUL LIVES OF
FAITHFUL DEVOTION IN GRATEFUL RESPONSE TO YOUR BOUNTY TO US
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, WHO TAUGHT US TO PRAY ...

The Lord's Prayer