

The End Of The Year Of God's Grace: Christ The King

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by Fr. Matera

This past weekend, we marked the feast of *Jesus Christ the King*, a feast we celebrate every year at the end of the Church's Year of Grace. This Year of Grace began last December with the season of Advent when we waited in joyful hope for the coming of Christ in Christmas mystery and at the end of the ages. It continued with our celebration of Christmas and Epiphany, during which we reflected on the mystery of the Incarnation: the mystery of the eternal Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ. Then we entered the season of Lent so that we could renew and purify ourselves for the celebration of the Lord's Resurrection. Having been purified by works of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting we celebrated the Lord's Resurrection for fifty days. Then on the fiftieth day, Pentecost, we rejoiced in God's gift of the Spirit. Since then we have been in the season of "Ordinary Time," a time of extraordinary grace for us as we meditate on our Lord's life and ministry as recounted in the Gospel of Matthew.

But as we enter the last week of Ordinary Time and with this celebration of Christ the King, the Church's Year of Grace draws to a close. Next week will be the first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of yet another Year of Grace.

By celebrating this feast we proclaim our faith that Jesus Christ is the goal and the purpose of God's redemptive plan. God has created all things in and for Jesus Christ. Everything that has been created has been created through Jesus Christ. And the goal of God's creation is Jesus Christ. Put another way, we already know that outcome of God's redemptive plan for our salvation. We know that at the end of the ages, Jesus Christ will reign supreme. We know that at the end of the ages, Jesus Christ will be victorious over the great powers of Sin and Death that threaten our lives. We know that at the end of the ages, all will be well because all things will be fulfilled in Christ.

In the second reading from Mass, St. Paul points to Christ's victory over the powers of Sin and Death. First he notes that Christ has already overcome the power of death through his resurrection. Christ is the "first fruits" of the resurrection of the dead. Next, he notes that Christ is presently reigning, slowly overcoming the powers of Sin and Evil. Finally he says that at the end of the ages, Christ will rule supreme and when he does, Death will be destroyed and God will be all in all. Although it often seems that evil is more powerful than good, St. Paul assures us that God has already won the victory in Christ, and that Christ is already reigning at God's right hand.

In today's gospel, Jesus presents us with a powerful picture of the Final Judgment that will occur when he returns at the end of the ages. Like a shepherd he will gather all the nations and separate them in the way a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. On that day the criterion of judgment will be *mercy*. Did we extend or refuse mercy to others. If we did, we will at the right hand of the King. If we did not, we will be at the left hand of the King. Jesus assures us that he is present in the poorest of the poor so that the mercy we extend to them is the mercy we extend to

him, and the mercy we refuse to extend to him is the mercy we refuse to extend to him.

Yes, this is the end of another Year of Grace, a year during which God has bestowed his mercy and grace to us throughout the Church's Liturgical. And as we end this Year of Grace, we look forward to yet another Year of Grace that begins next week with on the First Sunday of Advent.

Father Matera