

Father O'Connor's Homily for 21 November 2021
Feast of Christ the King-B

Daniel 7: 13-14
Revelation 1: 5-8
John 18: 33b-37

Go back to the year 1925. It has been several years after World War I. Pope Pius XI is sitting in the Vatican, looking around the world, and he is worried. Mussolini is parading around Italy with arrogance. A man named Hitler has just been released from jail and his scary Nazi party is gaining strength. People everywhere seem to be losing faith and perspective. The pope feels he must come up with some sign, some symbol, to remind people what life is about and to whom we really belong.

What symbol did he choose? A king. He instituted the Feast of Christ the King. Jesus is the King of our hearts, our souls and our lives.

This feast has nothing to do with crowns and robes and palaces – concepts foreign to us as Americans. Rather, it has to do with the basic question: to whom or to what do we give our allegiance? It deals with how, on the everyday level, we act or should act. It deals with the daily decisions that we make that reveal the allegiance that we have.

Let me give you two stories of faithful allegiance and, in between them, a contrasting image:

Pope Pius XI's fears proved true, and Hitler rose to power and overran Europe. There were many heroes who resisted. One of them was King Christian X [1870-1947] of Denmark, who was aptly named. He was a Christian, and a person of character and principle.

One famous story tells of the order that came from the Nazi dictatorship that all Jews were to identify themselves by wearing armbands with the yellow Star of David. King Christian, whose small country had been occupied in 1940, said, "No. It's not right. One Danish person is the same as the next one."

So what did King Christian do? The story says that he put on a Star of David armband and let it be known that every loyal Dane should do the same. The next day in Copenhagen, nearly everyone was walking around wearing yellow Star of David armbands. As a result, the Danes saved ninety percent of their Jewish population.

The story, whether legend or fact, does convey an historical truth. Both King Christian and the majority of the Danish people stood by their Jewish citizens and saved almost all of them from Nazi persecution and death.

King Christian suffered for his allegiance to principle rather than to Hitler. He was imprisoned for two years. And after his release, when the Third Reich fell in 1945, he died just a few years later because of his ill-treatment.

The Feast of Christ the King asks: to whom or to what do we give our allegiance? For King Christian of Denmark it was to justice and charity, the very lessons that Jesus Christ our King taught us.

Let's move to some contrasting contemporary headlines. A father attacks the coach of his nine-year-old because the coach is not giving his kid enough playing time. Another father punches a referee for what he thinks is a bad call.

A psychologist laments the harm such actions do to kids. Competitive sports are games full of precise rules and regulations. The kids then watch in utter confusion as their fathers violate the rules of the game and the rules of fair play and character building. These fathers not only cause moral confusion by their acts of violence, but they are teaching their kids that this is the way to settle scores. In other words, they are teaching them that violence is king, not Jesus Christ.

For the second story about faithful allegiance, let's skip over to something that happened fifteen years ago [2 October 2006] in a one-room Amish schoolhouse [West Nickel Mines School] in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Ten young Amish girls, ages 6-13, were shot by a non-Amish assassin. Five of them died. The gunman then took his own life.

But revenge and counterviolence did not rule here. What did the Amish community do? They forgave the man! And not only did they forgive him, but they brought food and comfort to his wife and children who lived nearby.

Put yourself in their place. You have just rung the doorbell of the family whose husband and father brutally murdered your innocent daughter, and here you are bringing them food and forgiveness.

Of the 75 people present at the killer's burial, about half of them were Amish men and women, including parents who had buried their own children a day or so before.

And these same Amish people also asked that some of the money that had been raised for their own grieving families be given to the family of the man who killed and wounded their daughters. Would you and I, *could* you and I, do that? How different the Amish are from those brutish fathers who beat up their kids' coaches and referees.

As one Amish father who had lost a daughter in that schoolhouse killing said, “Forgiveness means giving up the right to revenge.”

Well, we say, the Amish are different from us, aren't they? They live a way of life apart from us. But they take King Jesus at His word when He says that we should forgive our enemies, just as He did when He was dying on the cross: “Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing” [Luke 23: 34]. They forgive their enemies because they believe that they cannot enter heaven if they hate anyone. For them the matter is plain and simple: Christ the King has spoken and He leads us by His own example.

Here is a people that had every right to blame and lash out. But the football fathers' way was not their way. They will not serve the demons of anger and revenge. They serve Another and live their allegiance to Him. We Catholics can learn something from their example as a people of peace.

So there you are: King Christian of Denmark and the Amish of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Today, let us pray for the grace and the courage to live our allegiance daily to Jesus Christ, our sovereign King.