

Solemnity of Christ the King
November 21, 2010
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Enthroned on the Cross

2 Samuel 5:1-3
Psalm 122
Colossians 1:12-20
Luke 23:35-43

One of the most noticeable characteristics of Saint Peter's Square is the enormous Egyptian obelisk rising almost 100 feet from the center of the square. Many people would say that the 330-ton monument looks out of place at the Vatican. The reason it looks out of place is because Saint Peter's Square is not its original home. The obelisk was originally erected around the year 1850 B.C. as a monument to the Pharaoh of Egypt. After the Romans conquered Egypt around the time of Christ, the obelisk was brought to Rome as a testimony of the Roman Emperor's superiority. However, the monument did not remain standing.

Eventually, Rome was invaded by barbarians who knocked the obelisk over and it eventually became half-buried near the old Basilica of Saint Peter, covered in ivy. As the Church converted the barbarians and a renewed Christian culture emerged in Rome, Pope Sixtus V rebuilt Saint Peter's Basilica and had the obelisk erected in the center of St. Peter's plaza, where it stands today.

While the obelisk looks out of place, it is a very visible reminder that there is a Ruler greater than any emperor or pharaoh. On the top of the obelisk stands a bronze cross containing a fragment of the cross that Jesus was crucified on and the inscriptions on the base of the monument read, "Behold the cross of the Lord, let his enemies flee, the lion of the Tribe of Judah has conquered!"¹ Christ conquers! Christ rules! Christ reigns!"²

Jesus Christ is our Eternal King and His Kingdom lasts forever! However, as the inscription on the obelisk explains, Jesus' Kingdom and Reign are unlike any other king who has ever lived. Christ the King's throne is not a velvet-covered, gold-gilded, jewel-encrusted seat, but a *cross*. This is the *paradox* of Christ's Kingship. It's a paradox noted by Pope John Paul II when he wrote—

If it is assessed according to the criteria of this world, Jesus' kingship can appear 'paradoxical.' Indeed, the power He exercises does not fit into earthly logic. On the contrary, His is the power of love and service that requires the [free] gift of self and the consistent witness to the truth.³

¹ This inscription, in Latin, faces the exit of the plaza.

² This inscription, in Latin, faces the Basilica of St. Peter.

³ Preached by Pope John Paul II at the Angelus on Christ the King Sunday in 2001. Also, see John 18:37.

Today, as we celebrate the centrality of the cross in the Reign of our King, Jesus Christ, it is beneficial for us to look at the implications. What does it mean for us to have a King who chose to be enthroned on a cross?

First, the cross is a sign of radical obedience to the Father's will. In Paul's letter to the Philippians we read that Jesus "humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). The cross challenges us *to become increasingly obedient* to Christ the King. Obedience literally means "to listen," therefore, to be obedient means that we must grow in our ability to listen to Christ, especially as He speaks through Sacred Scripture, the Church, and the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, the throne of the cross challenges us *to live for others* more than for ourselves. Jesus explained the selflessness of the cross when He said, "If anyone wishes to come after me he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Jesus' cross meant giving up everything and yet always having enough; it was sorrow, yet the greatest joy. The same thing is true for us when we choose to pick up our crosses and live for others. It will lead us out of our comfort and vanity—which is usually painful—but the reward of such love is new life.

Lastly, Christ's enthronement upon the cross invites us to let ourselves become His cross and His throne. In doing so, we will reign with Christ. Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, explained this writing, "If we have died with [Christ] we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:11-12a). Christ invites us *to be His cross*—to let Him be enthroned in our lives. We get a tangible experience of this at every Mass when we come up for Communion and literally let our bodies—our hands and tongues—become thrones for Christ, present in the Eucharist.

Like the obelisk in Saint Peter's Square, you and I are challenged to be witnesses to the cross of Christ the King and to His Eternal Reign. With our words and actions—with our very lives—we are to proclaim to the world, "Behold the cross of the Lord... Christ conquers! Christ rules! Christ reigns!"