

Baltimore Youth Catholic Conference

Not Many Kings, A Lot of Despots

When we speak about Christ as our King, it might not mean much. In the United States, we don't have a King. Our rulers don't wear gold crowns or wear fancy robes.

But we get the idea not all kings were nice people. More than a few of them misused their power and wealth. And many kings demanded absolute obedience and loyalty. In more recent times, dictators like Hitler demanded people's absolute obedience.

We might say that we don't have a king or a dictator in our lives. In one way that's true. We're blessed to live in a democracy. But there are things that can rule our lives, if we're not careful, things that are more demanding than any king or dictator.

Take cyber-bullying which has caused some young people to take their own lives. Or think about young people that get hooked on meth or prescription drugs. Or young people that fall into sexual addictions. Sometimes the rulers and dictators in our lives seem less serious but they still claim most of our time and attention. How many young people worry all the time about their profile on Facebook? Or worry that they don't have right clothes or the right friends?

So this feast of Christ the King is a good moment to ask - Who is in charge of my life? Who or what is my ruler? Whoever is in charge and whatever is ruling, are they good to me or bad for me? Sin always promises to make us happy but only delivers sadness.

Fall in Love with God

Sometimes old people can give us good advice. I'm old but there's someone even older than me whose advice I'd like to share with you today. His name was Fr. Pedro Arrupe - a Jesuit. Once upon a time, he was the boss of the man we call Pope Francis. This is what Fr. Arrupe said: "Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what

seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with you evenings, how you will spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.”

The feast of Christ the King is all about find God and falling in love with Him. It’s a day when we replace all those things that rule our lives, all the peer pressure, all the bullying, all of the dependencies we build up - with the love Jesus our Good shepherd has for each one of us. Pope Francis has this to say to us: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen, and free you.” All that Jesus our King wants of us is our love. All he wants of us is to be open to his love. He is waiting to free us from all the bad things that want to rule our lives.

Spreading Joy

Sometimes we think we could be happy if things were different in our lives: if we lived in a different neighborhood, went to a different school, had more friends and more money. And sometimes we look for happiness and fulfillment in a little electronic screen but the more we look for happiness there, the less we find. At the end of the day, what makes us happy, joyful people is truth that God loves us infinitely, he loves us even more than our moms and dads; he loves us even more than our best teacher or our favorite coach; he loves us more than we love ourselves. And God’s Son became one of us and died to save us to show us just how much our Father in heaven really loves us & to share that love with us, especially in the Mass & the Sacrament of Reconciliation. His love is stronger than anything and anyone who would rule & ruin our lives.

Once we fall in love, once we really encounter Jesus in prayer, we’ll really start following Jesus. We’ll claim him as Lord and Savior, as the King of our lives. And everything will change. We might go to the same school, eat the same food, wear the same clothes, but we’ll have in our heart a new joy, the joy of knowing we are really and truly loved by God. We won’t become religious freaks but people will know there’s something different, something better about us. Because people who have hope, live differently!

If a person is miserable, everyone knows about it. If a person is joyful, everyone also knows. The way people are won over to the Lord and to the Church is not by threats but instead by joy, by the deep happiness of those who opened their hearts to Jesus and who are willing to share his love with others, especially the poor. His love makes us more sensitive to the needs of others.

Maybe some of you have been to Our Daily Bread. It's a place where people who have nowhere to go come for meals. When I visit, I often see young people there, just like you, helping to serve. That's an important way of bearing witness to the Gospel. It's a way of saying I'm sharing the blessings of God's love for me with others. And when we serve those in need, we're serving Christ.

When You Go Home

It's fun to be together and I'm really grateful to everyone who worked so hard that we could be together today. But now comes the next part. We're going home. Tomorrow I'll be working. You'll be at school. Will we carry the joy of knowing we're loved by God with us? Will we show our love and loyalty to Christ, the King of Love, our Shepherd?

Joy cannot be contained. It must be shared. Go out and spread the joy! God bless you!