

Colossians 1:13–20: [God the Father] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup>For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup>For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

### Dead Kings Don't Reign

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The text for today's message is the Epistle reading from Colossians, the 1st chapter.

#### INTRODUCTION

What do the following people have in common? David, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus the Great, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Herod, Charlemagne, Henry VIII, George III, and Louis XVI.

If you said they were all kings, you would be correct. If you said they were all dead you'd be correct, too. If you said they were all dead kings, you'd be right on the money!

Even though he's no longer president, Bill Clinton still tries to influence politics. I'm sure when Barak Obama leaves office, he'll be certain to give us his two cents worth whenever he has the opportunity. And Hillary Clinton, even though she lost the election, will no doubt try to pull the strings of the Democratic party. In other words, even though they're not in power, former presidents and politicians will still try to have an impact on how you live your lives.

But when a king dies, his rule, his influence, his policies—they all die with him. Now, if he

was a bad king, like Herod the Great, that can be a good thing. Herod was the king who wanted to kill the baby Jesus, so Joseph had to take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt. Only after Herod died, could the Holy Family return to Judea safely. Now, if we have a bad president or governor, we just have to wait until the next election cycle and vote him or her out. But if you have a bad king, things aren't likely going to change until he dies. Which is why throughout history, kings were often assassinated—it was the only way to affect policy changes in a monarchy!

But if you have a good king, his death is a bad thing, because a good king serves his people well. Thus, when a good king dies, there's much mourning because his policies, his benevolency, and his influence have died with him.

And so it is true, whether a king is good for his people or bad for his people, dead kings don't reign.

Now it's interesting that the Gospel reading for the Last Sunday of the Church Year—which is also known as Christ the King Sunday—is Luke's account of the crucifixion of Jesus. On the one hand, there's much celebration by Jesus' enemies because they didn't want this king to reign over them. "We have no king but Caesar," they announced to Pilate. The irony here is that the Caesar at the time of Christ's death was the vile and sexually depraved Tiberius Caesar—far from what anyone would call a good king.

On the other hand, there was much mourning by Jesus' disciples, for in Jesus they saw what they had hoped to be a powerful yet benevolent king—one who would lead them, guard and protect them. But there He hangs on a cross—certainly not a suitable throne for a king. And they mourn because dead kings don't reign.

But in His High Priestly Prayer Jesus says this of His impending crucifixion: "Father, the

hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him” (Jn. 17:1–2).

Indeed, the crucifixion of Jesus was to the glorification of God the Father. For in His death, the Son of God completed the work of redeeming sinners for His Heavenly Father. Which is why Paul says in our Epistle reading, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,<sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” And that is why in First Corinthians Paul says, “we preach Christ Crucified—a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23–24).

The cross is the power and wisdom of God because by His death on the cross Jesus defeated the domain of darkness. And so we prayed in today’s Collect: Lord Jesus Christ, You reign among us by the preaching of Your cross. Forgive Your people their offenses that we, being governed by Your bountiful goodness, may enter at last into Your eternal paradise; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Every time we pray the Collect, we’re reminded that though Jesus died for our sins, He lives and reigns with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever! Amen!

Thus, on this Last Sunday of the Church Year, we celebrate Christ as King, because Jesus is no dead king, but our risen and living Lord and Savior, and because He lives now and forever, we live now and forever in His kingdom!

Now think about this: If Jesus were a dead king, His victory over the domain of darkness would have been a futile victory—He would still be in the grave, and there would be no

forgiveness, no victory over death and devil, no salvation, no eternal life in heaven. The devil would reign supreme in this world—and we would all be under his terrible rule.

But Paul says in our Epistle reading: “[God the Father] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Again, dead kings don’t reign, so the only way for us to live in the kingdom of God’s Son is if Jesus is living—the Firstborn from the Dead!

And not only does Paul emphasize that Jesus is living, but that He is truly and fully God: <sup>15</sup>“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. . . . For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus makes the invisible God visible. To put it another way, Jesus is the face of God’s love and grace. Jesus is proof that God doesn’t desire the death or condemnation of anyone, for in Jesus, God was willing to sacrifice His own Son to take away the sin of the world.

And because Jesus is fully God, His kingdom is an eternal, all-powerful kingdom—His benevolency is an all-powerful benevolency—His love is a never-ending love—His peace an eternal peace—and when Jesus says your sins are gone, they are gone.

But not only does the divine and eternal Son of God rule an eternal, all-powerful kingdom, through Him all things were created. Paul writes: “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.”

And if that wasn’t enough to show you that Christ is the world’s living King, Paul says, <sup>17</sup>“And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” That means without Jesus, nothing would exist—no King, no Kingdom. As you look around at creation, you see a creation that is corrupted by sin, but there is much in the way of power, majesty, order and beauty in

creation that points to its Creator—proof that Jesus holds all things together as the King of the Universe. If the devil ruled, there would only be suffering, death, ugliness and hate in this world. But because Jesus rules, there's order, beauty, life, joy, peace, healing, comfort, hope and love!

And then Paul adds, “<sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.” And this is really important because sometimes it looks like Jesus isn't in charge. That was the lament of God's people in the Old Testament. Malachi records their words: “It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.” To them it looked like evil was triumphant while godly people suffered. But the Lord promised them: “They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.”

And today, it often looks like evil has the upper hand. These are days in which the true Church on earth looks like Jesus while He hung on the cross: bleeding members, mocked, hated, defeated, dying—even dead. There's temptation to give up on God and go with the flow. But remember, that cross was the glory of God the Father and Christ's victory over our enemies. Everything you are and have as Christians—especially redemption and the forgiveness of sins—is because of the cross.

And because Jesus is no dead king, but the Risen and Living Lord of Glory, on the Day of Resurrection, when the King returns in glory, the true Glory of His Church will shine! Until then,

because Jesus is living and ruling to all eternity, you can be certain you are under the all-powerful and benevolent care of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

#### Conclusion

Because Jesus is no dead king, He lives and rules to all Eternity. Christ as King is both Law and Gospel. The Law message is this: Don't reject Him. Don't deny or neglect his Word for that is what makes you His disciples. And when He does return there will be retribution against evil-doers. But the Gospel message is this: Jesus will return. On that day when Christ is revealed as King, no longer will God's people live under the hidden glory of the cross but in the revealed glory of the Risen Savior.

On that day all believers will live and reign with Jesus in His kingdom forever and ever.

Amen!

In Jesus' Name. Amen.