



MONASTÈRE SAINT-BENOÎT

OCTOBER 2021 ~ THE ONE AND TRUE KING

Dear Oblates and Associates,

Right at the beginning of his Holy Rule, in the second sentence of the Prologue, our holy father Saint Benedict refers to Christ as True King: *Christus verus Rex*. He follows this with images of God as the Father we hope never to anger and as the Lord we hope never to dread because of our sins. (Cf. [Father Prior's recent sermon regarding the just judgments of an angered King](#).) Indeed, such references to God as Father and Lord are frequent in the Holy Rule, but the few times Saint Benedict chooses to use the title of King indicate he does so with special purpose. So, while paternity and dominion are attributes commonly ascribed to kings, even in our modern world where they are rare, to the Roman that he was, and to the generations of monks for whom Saint Benedict composed a rule, kingship had a full and rich meaning; it meant something substantive to call someone King and one did not do so lightly.

Etymology

In language, most words inherit form and meaning from older words and elements, but a few words are instead sources of meaning for others. In Latin, the word *rex* is one of these. From *rex* come words like the adjective *rectus*, which means straight or right, as in the English words correct and rectify. (Its plural form *recta* appears frequently in the Roman Rite liturgy, notably in the collect to the Holy Ghost.) The verb *regere* also comes from *rex*, and by extension the word *regula* (as in the Holy Rule). From just these two variations, we can discern many other words in English that derive therefrom: regulate, right, ruler, etc. Even the secondary meaning of the word 'ruler' reveal notes of the meaning of *rex*. Besides a person who rules, it refers to that simple instrument used by generations of schoolchildren to measure and draw straight lines. Saint Benedict, then, understands a king to be a ruler who is, among other things, the standard and measure of what is right, a model and example to be followed, rectitude in person and righteousness in action.

The Qualities of Kings

Kingship, of course, means much more than this, and Pope Pius XI describes many other admirable attributes of Christ the King in his 1925 encyclical [Quas Primas](#). Modern men, too, have reflected on what it means to be a leader. For instance, Franz Werfel, the author of [The Song of Bernadette](#), in his 1925 play [Juarez and Maximilian](#) (made into a movie in 1939), explores the contrasts between a dictator, Napoleon III, nobility personified in the character of Maximilian I, and a president, Benito Juarez, the founder of the modern Mexican republic. For Saint Benedict, however -- himself of noble lineage -- Christ is neither dictator nor aristocrat nor ideologue. Nor is Christ's kingship only some academic or cosmic and distant, apocalyptic concept. What distinguishes Christ as King in the Holy Rule of Saint Benedict is His leadership in the struggle against sin and evil.

War

Saint Benedict knows that it is the role of kings to wage war, and he and his monks witnessed this first hand. The war that concerned them most, and should concern us too, is not one over territory or power, but the war

over souls, our souls and the souls of those we love. (Cf. [Father Prior's recent sermon about the importance of caring for souls](#).) This war for souls is costly and terrible, and its risks dire: slavery and death, destruction and everlasting suffering. This war is being fought not abroad or elsewhere, or at some other point in history, but here and now, in our own nations, in our own homes, in our own families and in our own personal life. And Christ's involvement in it is immediate and real. Prefigured by the pillar of cloud (Exodus 14) that moved to intercept the Egyptians in their pursuit of the Hebrew people approaching the Red Sea, the crossing of which itself prefigures the Sacrament of Baptism, Christ the King defends and protects His subjects. *Dominus enim pugnat pro eis*, cried those Egyptians as they turned and fled, "Their God fights for them!" But the war effort is not God's alone. Christ the King does battle against our adversaries, but He also enlists us in the struggle to save our souls. Like the Master of the vineyard seeking laborers to hire (Saint Matthew 20), so too our King calls for cooperators to join Him in the fight.

The Enemy

Later in the Prologue to his Holy rule, Saint Benedict mentions two things as being in direct opposition to Christ: the evil spirit and his temptations, and in the first chapter he specifies that it is *contra diabolum* against the devil that monks fight. But such references are few and infrequent, because our holy father prefers to warn us about and avert any contact, rather than have us enter into direct confrontation with evil. Keenly aware that original and actual sin have weakened human nature so that it has become inclined to stray by the sloth of disobedience *per inobedientiae desidiam*, his is a mostly pre-emptive and deterrent strategy, whereby temptation, and therefore sin, is avoided or prevented. His admonition in the forty-eighth chapter of the Holy Rule that idleness is the enemy of the soul *otiositas inimica est anima* reveals just that. Saint Benedict also knows that even in Paradise it is not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18) and that it was precisely when she was alone that Eve encountered the cunning serpent. This is why Saint Benedict affirms that cenobites, who live in community *multorum solacio* with the help of brethren *fraterna acie* are the strongest kind of monks. (Chapter 1)

To Dwell in the Tabernacle of His Kingdom

Soldiers on active duty often live in tents, and so did the Hebrews freed from Egypt, first to worship on God's holy mountain, then to traverse the desert on their way to the Promised Land. It is with this in mind that our holy father Saint Benedict uses the expression *regni tabernaculo*: "... to see Him who has called us unto His kingdom and if we wish to dwell in the tabernacle of His kingdom... So, brethren, we have asked the Lord about the dwellers in His tabernacle, and have heard what is the duty of him who would dwell therein; it remains for us to fulfil this duty. Therefore our hearts and bodies must be made ready to fight under the holy obedience of his commands." (Prologue) The monastery itself is one of Saint Benedict's greatest defenses against the enemy and his deceptions, first and foremost because it is here where Christ the King dwells and is served. The same column of cloud and fire that defended the Hebrew people from the Egyptians eventually settled above the Tabernacle designated as God's dwelling, and later over the Ark of the Covenant as the *שכינה shekinah* the 'glory of God'. In the monastery, however, the True Presence of Christ the King is more than signified: it is the Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist, adored with awe, offered with reverence and received with love and proper dispositions, extending from the Tabernacle at the altar to the Oratory, to the whole monastery and to the bodies and souls of the monks, to make of them His dwelling, His kingdom.

Christendom

This effect of the love of Christ the King, and the love for Christ the King, -- *amore traxit omnia* we chant in the hymn at Lauds on the Feast of Christ the King, 'the love of Christ attracts all' -- is not limited to monks and monasteries and often spreads beyond the cloister. The monasteries originally founded by Saint Benedict influenced local communities who in turn swayed rulers and nations. Benedictine monasteries proliferated across the European continent and a Christian civilisation developed that in large part recognized the

prerogatives and the gentle rule of Christ the King. The spiritual hegemony known as Christendom was not its goal, however, but was kept alive by the love for Christ the King.

Not of this World

Lamentably, the vitality and benefits of Christendom have not lasted. Nations cannot become or remain Christian unless their populations and leaders become or remain Christians. The enemy continues to wage war on Christianity even to our day, trying to erase every last vestige of it in our culture. Like tents and tabernacles, it is not permanent, but neither is the battlefield of this world in which we dwell with Christ and fight under His command. Saint Benedict wants his monks to understand that this world will not last forever, nor will any attachments we may have to it. So too, our resolve to serve Christ the King may not remain constant. While they wandered in the desert, the Hebrew people had no king but God, but once they entered Canaan, they clamored to be given a human king, as other nations had. What they got was imperfect men and worldly entanglements, wars and captivities, temples defiled or destroyed, the Ark of the Covenant lost, and after a thousand years, occupation by a pagan empire, a puppet king and corrupt priests who goaded them to reject the One True King, now human as well as God, with the cry, "We have no king but Caesar!" "We slothful, ill-living, and negligent people must blush for shame," Saint Benedict decries in the final chapter of the Holy Rule. But our holy father is as realistically hopeful and confident in the triumph of Christ the King. The betrayal of men, the reign of tyrants, and the war for souls, none of these things can last forever either; one day all these will end too. "Whoever, therefore, thou art that hastenest to thy heavenly country," our holy father continues, "fulfil first of all by the help of Christ this little Rule for beginners. And then at length, under God's protection, shall thou attain those aforesaid loftier heights of wisdom and virtue."

Under God's Protection

Another way in which the monastery is itself a defense against the enemy and his deceptions is by keeping these out as much as possible. This is why, even though they should be received like Christ Himself, guests are initially greeted with caution. "The kiss of peace shall not be offered until after the prayers have been said, on account of the delusions of the devil." (Chapter 53) Moreover, "the monastery should, if possible, be so arranged that all necessary things... be within the enclosure, so that the monks may not be compelled to wander outside it, for that is not at all expedient for their souls." (Chapter 66) But if perchance stepping away from the security of the monastery is ever required, "let not anyone presume to tell another what he has seen or heard outside the monastery, because this causes great harm." (Chapter 67).

Practical Applications

Not everyone who loves and wishes to serve Christ the King, however, enjoys the security and protection of the Benedictine monastic enclosure; one can, nevertheless, benefit from the practical application of some of the precepts of Saint Benedict's Holy Rule.

Prayer: During his recent visit to our monastery, [His Eminence Cardinal Sarah](#) repeatedly exhorted the monks and the Faithful to pray, to pray assiduously. If one cannot dwell in it, one can at least frequent the Tabernacle of Christ the King. As mentioned in last month's reflection, give priority to prayer; attend Holy Mass; receive Christ in His Sacraments; visit the Blessed Sacrament; "first of all, whatever good work thou undertakest, ask Him with most instant prayer to perfect it" (Prologue); pray especially the Lord's Prayer (Chapter 13), in which Christ the King prays for the coming (present tense) of God's Kingdom and for us not to be led into temptation but delivered from evil; "apply oneself frequently to prayer." (Chapter 4) Remember, adoration, worship and prayer are due to God in justice, and therefore the duty of all intelligent beings.

Confession: "When evil thoughts come into one's heart, to dash them at once on the rock of Christ and to manifest them to one's spiritual father." (Chapter 4) Our holy Father Saint Benedict repeats this again as the Fifth Degree of Humility (Chapter 7), both times to reinforce what he first said in the Prologue. The enemy

works by stealth and can be thwarted by exposure. Benedictine customs include various ways of acknowledging faults: in choir, in Chapter, the use of tools, when noticed by a superior, etc. Sins, of course, should be confessed in the Sacrament of Penance, the grace received thereby being not only curative, but also preventative, according to Saint Pius X, who expanded the discipline of the Sacraments of both Eucharist and Penance to children for this reason. It is also salutary to apologize for lesser faults: to one's parents, spouse, boss or teacher. Making the admission of faults a habit is a very powerful deterrent against these and other faults becoming themselves habitual.

Obedience: Immediately after inviting us to fight for Christ the King, Saint Benedict exhorts us to take up the strong and glorious arms of obedience; he then devotes Chapter 7 (well worth frequent re-reading) of his Holy Rule to describe them. For the Patriarch of monks, obedience is a virtue, not routine, servile or mechanical, but refined with much practice, like an art or talent, until it becomes second nature and is done well and easily, promptly and pleasingly. The universality of God's Commandments and the Precepts of the Church make it evident that this virtue can be developed anywhere, even outside the monastic enclosure. Let us therefore fulfil our duty to obey them, the just laws of our society, and the directives of our parents, bosses, teachers and other superiors, with fervor and alacrity.

Activity: As mentioned earlier, Saint Benedict calls idleness the enemy of the soul. Idleness may be a manifestation of indolence or sloth, which is itself a vice, but it can also result from an imbalance of imperatives: having too much to do for too long until one becomes exhausted. Then fatigue can serve as an excuse (by inimical suggestion) for dissipation. How many 'vacations' are just excuses for intemperance and vice, and how many 'destinations' promise to indulge them? Setting and observing prudent and well-ordered priorities, as suggested in last month's reflection, so that one's time is put to good use, without excess or gap, will not only forestall idleness, but more will actually get done. Monks spend significant portions of their day in prayer without being less productive in their work because of it. It is also important not to dally or procrastinate: "Our hearts and bodies must be ready" (Prologue); "the disciple's work is completed in the swiftness of the fear of the Lord... rapidly accomplished by those who are impelled by the desire of attaining life everlasting." (Chapter 5)

Silence: There are two kinds of silence: freedom from noise and tranquility of mind. The second is manifest by *taciturnitas*, the word used by Saint Benedict in the sixth chapter of his Holy Rule: reticence to speak. Both are broken by chatter and the modern phenomenon of pavlovian 'notifications' emitted by ubiquitous electronic devices. What peace (and how healthy and restful) it is to be in a quiet place with a quiet mind, to be able to contemplate God and the beauty of His works! Among the tools of good works numbered in the fourth chapter of the Holy Rule Saint Benedict includes: "To keep one's mouth from evil and depraved talk. Not to love much speaking. Not to speak vain words." The ability to hold one's tongue is also the ninth degree of humility. (Chapter 7)

Truth: If one must speak, then let it be to "utter truth from heart and mouth." (Chapter 4) Deception and guile are the enemy's weapons. Let us love the truth, then, and hold to it, to serve Him worthily who is Truth, the one true King.

Vigilance: "Keep constant guard over the actions of one's life," Saint Benedict instructs us in the fourth chapter of his holy Rule, and again in the seventh: "We must be on our guard against evil desires, for death lies close by the gate of delight." From the Prologue and throughout the Rule, our holy father reminds us frequently that God and angels watch our every action. This vigilance is not passive, such as viewing a screen, nor is it the search for an opportunity to entrap, accuse or harm. These are more characteristic of the enemy and the electronic communications he uses to invade our homes and lives. Rather, the watchfulness Saint Benedict advises is like that of a loving parent over an infant or small child, or the vigilance of night watchmen at the borders of safety. Especially at night. Compline begins the night watch for those who pray the Divine Office, with the reading of Saint Peter's admonition: *Sobrii estote et vigilate!* "Be sober and watch: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist ye, strong in

faith!" One of our oblates recently noted that the divisions of Matins, chanted by monks and nuns well before dawn, are called Nocturns, after the shifts of the military night watch.

Help of Brethren: The watchfulness of angels, or our own of ourselves, however, is less tangible than the watchfulness of other physical persons. If therefore being alone, or imagining ourselves unseen, is a danger, being around and in sight of others keeps us in check, as well as the enemy. Again, this is one of the reasons Saint Benedict affirms that cenobites who live in community are the strongest of monks. Other benefits of good brethren, or good company, include virtuous example, objective advice, fraternal correction, etc.

Flight: But company for company's sake is not enough. The world is full of those who do not know or care for Christ the King, who would influence or corrupt us by their scandalous example, unsavory suggestions, flattery or indulgence. We find instances of this in Saint Benedict's life more than in his Holy Rule: he abandoned Rome -- Christian Rome at that -- in disgust; later he would rather displace his monks and the monastery he had established than endure their being subjected to lascivious displays. (Life of Saint Benedict, Dialogues of Saint Gregory the Great, Book 2, Chapter 8) Prudence really is most often the better part of valor.

Esprit de corps: Yet even among good brethren and companions, the enemy can employ a deception to sow discord. Disguised as virtue or 'higher standards,' "there is an evil zeal of bitterness," Saint Benedict warns us in the penultimate chapter of his Holy Rule, *zelus amaritudinis malus* that is punctilious and pharisaical, blaming and fault-finding. To counter this, our Holy Father exhorts us to exercise good zeal with fervent love *ferventissimo amore*: "Let them bear with the greatest patience one another's infirmities, whether of body or character." (The whole of Chapter 72 is well worth a morning's meditation.) For, yes, we too have faults, we too are sinners; in this we are all equal. If Saint Benedict does not want the abbot to make any distinction of persons (Chapter 2), neither should the brethren: "We are all one in Christ, and have to serve alike in the army of the same Lord." And should the enemy point the magnifying glass of criticism at members of a different religious community, Saint Benedict repeats the same in Chapter 61: "Wherever we are, we serve the same Lord and fight for the same King." If our King is not a dictator or an aristocrat, than neither should we fancy ourselves marxist comrades or nobly bred. Saint Benedict is not egalitarian in any modern sense, concerned with rights or grievances. What makes us equal is our need for conversion, our duty to Christ the King and the commandment to love our neighbor. If there are any ranks among those who service Christ, "In this regard only are we distinguished in His sight: if we be found better than others in good works and humility." (Saint Benedict devotes long chapters of his Holy Rule to each of these, both worth frequent reading and meditation.)

Honor: The military has a code of honor, and badges to signify it. It is by good works and humility that those who serve Christ the King become honorable, by which they honor Christ as the One True King. All other allegiances are either false, or given to His delegates and subordinates for His sake. When Saint Benedict writes in the the sixty-first chapter of his Holy Rule *in omni loco uni Domino servitur, uni Regi militatur*, it is because Christ is served in all places, the same King for all, because His kingship is unique: Christ is the one and only true King.

The Cross: Our King has a standard, *Vexilla Regis*, a sign under which we will conquer because it is the instrument by which He overturned death and sin. (See last month's reflection.) It is from the Cross, crowned with thorns, that our divine King first reigned, *regnavit a ligno Deo*. So it is by the Cross that we too can triumph over the enemy, the cross Christ bids us as His followers to take up. "Share by patience in the passion of Christ," Saint Benedict concludes the Prologue, "that we may deserve to be partakers in His Kingdom." It is by the Sign of the Cross that Christians begin and end their prayers, the Catechism teaches, and that Christians should make the Sign of the Cross in times of danger or temptation. It was by the Sign of the Cross that Saint Benedict was preserved from being poisoned; and it is the Sign of the Cross that he bid the young noble bearing his lamp to make when he was tempted to murmur. (Life, Chapters 3 and 20) And then there is the Cross of Saint Benedict struck on a medal with an acrostic and a rhyming couplet: both prayers to be said when confronted by the enemy. (See Dom Guéranger's excellent pamphlet on the Cross and Medal of Saint Benedict.)

Sacrifice: To the world, suffering is horrifying and absurd, and to be avoided at all costs. But endured and offered with love, as sacrifice in union with the Sacrifice of Christ our King wrought for our redemption upon the Cross, suffering takes on meaning, becomes valuable, expiates for sin, unites us to the saints in Heaven, the Church Triumphant, and the holy souls in Purgatory, the Church Suffering, and advances the Kingdom of Christ. *Sicut unum est pro omni victima sacrificium, ita unum gente sit regnum*, wrote saint Leo in the sermon read at Matins on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, "as there is one sacrifice for many victims, so there may be one kingdom for all nations."

Yearning: "Desire eternal life with all spiritual longing." (Chapter 4) Since His Ascension, Christ the King reigns from Heaven seated at the right hand of His Father. Innumerable saints, monks and nuns, and people for all walks of life, by His Grace have joined Him there to be happy with Him forever. This why we were made; this is why we know Him, love Him and serve Him in this life. This is why we have joined the little school of the Lord's service established by Saint Benedict. May we learn from him and, with the help of his intercession, one day join him in chanting God's praises before the throne of Christ the King.

Thank you for your charity in [supporting of the monastery](#), and for making our needs know to others.

I remain your disposition for any further contact you may wish to have through the Oblates and Associates' email address: oblatietsocii@monasterebrignoles.org. Please be assured that you are included in the *fratribus absentibus* prayed for at the end of each Office, and indeed of our gratitude for all that you do for us.

Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus,

Dom Anselm Marie.
Master of Oblates and Associates.