

- Several years ago I was standing in line at a coffee shop when I noticed a group of 4 young men eyeballing me very seriously as if they were debating whether or not to speak to me.
- Because the Roman collar is a powerful symbol, I think most priests find that we often provoke a reaction in people wherever we go. Most times it's a smile or a nod of deference, but occasionally it's a sneer or look of disdain.
- These particular guys in the coffee shop were not smiling, and as I overheard their conversation I quickly realized that they were probably some type of fundamentalist or evangelical Christians looking to debate.
- Just as I was handed my coffee, one of the young men asked me if I was a Catholic priest. When I answered affirmatively, he then asked: "So why do you go by 'Father' if our Lord tells us in Matthew 23 to "call no one on earth your father"?"
- I, in turn, asked him, "What do you call the man who cooperated with your mother to create you?" – pointing out that Jesus was speaking metaphorically and not literally here. And thus ensued a 45-minute conversation on all their misconceptions about Catholicism.
- Unfortunately, at the end of it, I was unable to sway their thinking, for they were convinced that the only authority any Christian should ever turn to is Scripture, and Scripture alone.
- While Catholics certainly venerate Sacred Scripture as an authority of greatest importance, we also realize that the constant teaching Tradition of the Church is important too.
- Moreover, we believe that while Holy Mother Church may never teach anything contrary to what is found in Sacred Scripture, only Holy Mother Church has the authority to interpret Sacred Scripture properly. Christ gave this authority only to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.
- The very beautiful thing about those 4 young men I encountered in that coffee shop was that they recognized God's sovereignty, and they very clearly were trying to subject themselves to Him in order to be saved.
- Their mistake was that they failed to recognize the very instrument our Lord left in place on earth as a means of continuing His saving mission. They failed to recognize the historical fact that Jesus founded a Church to whom He gave the authority to teach in His name.
- They failed to remember how our Lord told Simon Peter that he was the rock upon whom He would found this Church, and how the gates of hell would never prevail against the Church because He would send the Holy Spirit to guide her always.
- Thus, we know that the Church has an undeniable authority, for it is She who, by God's design, exercises His authority on earth.
- Today's readings raise this important issue of authority. In the first line of the first reading today, our Lord says: "A great King am I, . . . and my name will be feared among the nations."
- And in the Gospel Jesus speaks to His disciples and the crowds about divine authority.
- Jesus tells them not to be called 'Rabbi', for there is but one teacher. They are told to call no man on earth 'father,' for there is but one Father in Heaven. And Jesus tells them not to be called 'Master,' for there is but one master – and it is Christ – and Christ is King.
- In short, Jesus is calling the crowds to recognize the supreme authority of God, and He's inviting them to place themselves under God's sovereignty. As such, these readings call us to examine who or what it is we worship.

- It is the nature of man to worship. God has created us in such a way that we are hard-wired, so to speak, to give honor and homage to something. We see this tendency to worship displayed in every culture throughout history.
- Sadly, in our brokenness, man sometimes tends to worship himself rather than God. Indeed, this is how the ancient serpent tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden so long ago.
- He tempted them to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil by promising them that they would become like gods. Thus it was that he duped them, and we all now bear the terrible punishment for this disordered desire in our first parents.
- But while Adam and Eve brought sin and death upon mankind, Jesus (the new Adam) – who was born of Mary (the new Eve) – brought life and salvation to mankind through His suffering, death, and resurrection.
- Because of this, we call Christ our King. But His kingship is not like that of earthly kings. Christ's kingship is a spiritual sovereignty, not a coercive sovereignty. His sovereignty is a gentle invitation to holiness – an invitation that must be accepted if we hope to go to Heaven.
- Indeed, becoming holy by imitating Jesus in every aspect of our lives is not only the way that we place ourselves under His authority, but it is also the very best homage that we can pay our Sovereign Lord.
- Placing ourselves under Christ's sovereignty also requires that we make ourselves subject to the authority of His Church. Indeed, the Church is not extraneous to our salvation; She is essential to our salvation.
- The *Catechism* teaches that: "The Church in this world is the sacrament of salvation, the sign and the instrument of the communion of God and men" (CCC 780). This is because we know Christ through the Church who makes Him present to us even now.
- As Catholics in America, we often have a tendency to think with a "me and Jesus" attitude, as if the Church doesn't really matter much. But this is not a Catholic way of thinking at all, for without the Church, we do not have Christ present to us.
- Salvation comes to us from Christ through the Church.
- Thus, being loyal subjects to Christ our King means that we must also be the loving children of Holy Mother Church. This we do by living as good and faithful Catholics, following Her laws and teachings with integrity and being faithful to the Sacraments.
- For when we follow the Church's authentic teachings, when we submit ourselves to Her lovingly and obediently in every way, then we can have confidence that we are truly subjecting ourselves to the sovereignty of Christ our King.
- My dear brothers and sisters, Christ our King is calling us today to worship Him, and Him alone. He is calling us to place ourselves under His authority. Let us do so by living lives of authentic holiness, and by living our Catholic faith with integrity.
- Let us draw close to the bosom of Holy Mother Church, and trust that by doing so, our Lord, in His goodness and mercy, will protect us and save us as our King.