

Holy citizens

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This Sunday is the Feast of Christ the King. All of the readings for this Sunday focus on kingship—David's, God's, Jesus'. Jesus' views on kingship are revealed in his famous discussion with Pilate. Jesus makes it clear that his kingship is directed at testifying to the truth.

Jesus is a king with a specific mission: he has come into the world to testify to the truth. The truth is not instrumental to some other political purpose. It does not serve to support Jesus' power or authority. Instead it is the decisive identity marker of Jesus and his followers—they are “of the truth” rather than “of the world.” Jesus has already made this point in his prayer for his followers in John 17. There he says that his followers do not belong to the world, just as he does not belong to the world. Jesus then asks the Father to “sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

Jesus' kingdom is based on truth, and this truth can make the citizens of this kingdom holy. We should be wary of a kingdom directed toward holiness. It is simply too easy to point out examples of self-acquired holiness, which are nothing more than superficial acts of piety, masking real hostility and hatred. (Nobody described this false type of holiness better than the writer Flannery O'Connor in her short story “Revelation.”)

Nevertheless, true holiness is one of God's deepest desires for us. God's desire for holiness is a function of God's desire for unbroken intimacy with us. Holiness fits us for friendship with God. As with all of the best friendships, a friendship with God is based on holding important things in common, having a common love and a common goal. God's call to holiness is an invitation to love what and whom God

loves.

It is important to remember, however, that in addition to praying that his followers would be sanctified in the truth, Jesus prays that his followers will not be taken out of the world. Indeed, he explicitly sends them into the world. It could hardly be any other way. If holiness leads us to love what and whom God loves, and if we are followers of the king who both is himself “the truth” and bears witness to the truth, then this kingdom must send its citizens out into the world—to bear witness to the truth in word and deed in imitation of its king.