

Devotions for the Week of Christ the King

Monday of Christ the King – Prayer of the Week

Lord Jesus Christ, so govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your glorious return, we may persevere in both faith and holiness of living; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

At the founding of the United States, when the constitution was first implemented, there was a debate about how to refer to the officials of the state. How should one address the president or the speaker of the house or a congressperson? Some wanted official titles like, "His excellency." Others sought a more complete break with the European tradition and argued for a simple, "Mr. President." The Senate, under the leadership of the Vice-President, John Adams, argued for European-style titles. The House of Representatives, having a more populist character, wanted the simpler titles.

In the course of the debate the members of the House of Representatives started referring to John Adams, who had a substantial girth, as "His Rotundity." Eventually they won out. We still refer to the leader of the United States simply as "Mr. President."

We call Jesus, "Lord," in this prayer and address it to Him. That term has a rich meaning. Out of respect for the name of God, Jewish people never pronounced that name. They always substituted the word "Lord" in its place. But calling someone Lord, "Kyrios" in Greek, is also a way of acknowledging authority. Our culture has eschewed such titles for the most part. That could be an egalitarian impulse on our part, or it could be something else, including a sense of rebellion. When you call someone Lord, there is an implication of obedience due to that One whom you so name. We struggle with the very idea of obedience, denigrating the obedient as "sheep," usually with our lips curled into a sneer. But this is a mistake. Paul says in Romans 1:5 that his ministry can be summed up as an exhortation to the "obedience of faith." In Philippians he wrote that on the great day of Christ's return in glory every knee will bow in obedience to the Lord Jesus (Phil. 2:10). Some will bend their knees willingly and in faithful love, others in fear and dread. But all will bend. It is good to speak that word now.

Tuesday of Christ the King – Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

⁹As I looked,
thrones were placed,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat;
his clothing was white as snow,
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames;
its wheels were burning fire.

¹⁰ A stream of fire issued
and came out from before him;

a thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;
the court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.

¹³"I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.

¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.

When Igor Stravinsky's Ballet "The Rite of Spring" premiered in Paris, in May of 1913, it caused quite a stir. In fact, it seems to have inflamed the audience. A near riot ensued. The reports vary of exactly what happened, but the police may have been called. Stravinsky's work has since been acclaimed as one of the great works of the century. But at the time the music and choreography broke so many rules that people could not handle it. A year later, when the work was to be performed again, the civil authorities stationed extra police nearby. But nothing happened. It seems that once exposed to the strange new music, people could listen to it. It was something that only affected them this way upon the first hearing of it.

How will I react to the scene which Daniel depicts here? Because he wrote this, I can imagine it, I suppose. Will it be different when it is a real thing before my eyes? Everyone knew Stravinsky was a creative composer who did some outlandish things. I doubt that the folks who put on their tuxedos and evening gowns and headed to the ballet that night were quite prepared for the assault on their senses which ensued.

I think for Daniel this must have been especially difficult. He did not know the incarnation of Jesus like we do. He looked forward to it, but the prophetic vision is not the same as that of Peter, James, and John's experience of the Christ. Thanks to their witness to Christ, I read that line about one "like a son of man" in vs. 13, and I recognize someone in this story. My Jesus is there, my Shepherd, my Savior. I marvel as all the power of the universe is vested in the One who loves me. The sheer magnitude of what Daniel sees should terrify us. But open your eyes and see. It is Jesus who smiles at you from that eternal throne and the position of all dominion, power, and authority.

(If you want to hear Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" you can find the London Philharmonic playing it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkwgPJZe8ms> . I learned a great deal about this event from this retelling of the story on Radiolab: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMSscm0AzHk> which suggests that all these new sounds may have affected the brains of the hearers in a strange way.)

Wednesday of Christ the King – Psalm 93

- ¹ The LORD reigns; he is robed in majesty;
the LORD is robed; he has put on strength as his belt.
Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. ² Your throne is established from of old;
you are from everlasting.
- ³ The floods have lifted up, O LORD,
the floods have lifted up their voice;
the floods lift up their roaring.
- ⁴ Mightier than the thunders of many waters,
mightier than the waves of the sea,
the LORD on high is mighty!
- ⁵ Your decrees are very trustworthy;
holiness befits your house,
O LORD, forevermore.

A few years ago, my family and I decided to visit the beach over the Christmas break. The weather was stormy but my children wanted some beach time. We packed up the rain gear and headed out, found a place to park near one of the jetties and started walking. First, we went out on the jetty. The waves were high. We came back and walked up and down the beach, finally circling behind a tall dune and through a park that lay just off the beach. As we were returning to the car along the road to the jetty, we were confronted with a surge of seawater coming down the road along followed by several damp and bedraggled fellow hikers. An unusually large wave had crested the jetty, inundated the parking lot, and strewed softball sized stones across the road. Had we still been on that jetty, it is likely we would have been swept away.

The psalmist speaks of floods lifting their voices and roaring. That moment served remind all of us of just how small we were in the face of the ocean. If you want to see some dramatic pictures, search the internet for images of the king tides which are striking the coast this fall and early winter.

The psalmist notes that those powerful forces of ocean and wind acknowledge the greater power of God. Mightier than the thunders of many waters and mightier than the waves of the sea is our mighty God. So, praise God today for His great might, but even more praise Him that His decrees are trustworthy. For one of those decrees was spoken in your baptism.

Thursday of Christ the King – Revelation 1:4b-8

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. ⁷Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

"I will make some time for you." I heard those words from a busy man and was grateful. I knew how much he had on his plate, but I really needed to talk to him about a few things. This meant he pushed some things out of the way for me, adjusted his schedule. We had the conversation and he helped me.

Did you notice how this little reading from John's Apocalypse begins and ends with an emphasis on time? John says that he brings grace and peace from "him who is and who was and who is to come." In the last verse he records those very words in the mouth of God. He is both the beginning and the end, the source and the destination.

For God, time is not the ever-rolling stream that Isaac Watts speaks of in his famous hymn (LSB 733). He encompasses all time. He made it all. He is in every moment simultaneously. All moments are "now" for God. If God ever says to you, "Let me make some time for you," He is not adjusting His calendar nor is He speaking metaphorically. He makes time for you.

I think about that when I have some trivial thing to pray about. Many of my prayers I fear are about very small things, things which should be beneath God. But John also asserts for us that God loves us and freed us from our sins by His blood. That means He is not beneath listening to my silly prayers. He will make time for that. If every Christian alive today just happened to speak a prayer in this moment, God would make two billion moments just to hear those prayers, each one of them. He can do that. He is the One who was, who is, and who is to come. He is the Alpha and the Omega.

Friday of Christ the King – John 18:33-37

³³ So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" ³⁵Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." ³⁷Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

“She got him,” the professor said, somewhat breathlessly. For a couple of semesters the faculty members had suspected that a member of the student body was cheating on exams. Twice he had been confronted but each time he had been able to wriggle out of the charge. But this time, shortly before he was to graduate, he cheated on the wrong exam. The professor was one of the mildest and most caring Christian people you could imagine. She would go to enormous lengths to help a struggling student. Regularly, she was voted by freshman for the “teacher of the year” award which was conferred at the end of the second semester. But beneath her gentle demeanor lies a steely devotion to the truth.

One of the student’s tricks was to change answers on a test after the professor had returned it. He would then to claim a grading error on the part of the professor. Alerted to this ploy, the instructor snapped a picture of the students’ tests before returning them to the class. Knowing the professor’s reputation for compassion for students, the young man tried it again, unaware of the steel trap which was about to close on him.

Our King bears witness to the truth, the truth of our sinful lives and the truth of his forgiveness and salvation. The student wailed and cried, pleaded with the professor that he needed this class to graduate, that his family was coming to graduation, that this surely could be forgotten. He would take the exam again, do extra credit, something. But she is of the truth. There is no bending in that truth. Just as the wages of sin is death, the wages of cheating in college are that you do not graduate.

No amount of wailing will avail us on that last and great day of judgment. Only the truth will save us. The truth which acknowledges who we are and what we have done, but also the truth which acknowledges who Jesus is and what He has done. We will not weasel out of the charge on a technicality. But we will be forgiven for that is also the truth. The young man did not receive a diploma, at least not yet. But he got a much better thing. The professor spoke to him of forgiveness, not a removal of the consequence of his cheating, but of a far greater thing, the removal of sin before God.