

Homily **Christ the King** (25.11.18)

## The unique claims of Christianity - Jesus Christ, Divine Mediator, Prophet & Redeemer

It was said to me recently, but it's been said a few times in the past, and it made me think about this feast. And it was a person who was talking about a Muslim friend, and they said,

"Well, at least we worship the same God."

And I knew what they meant, because certainly, the Church teaches that the links between the revealed religions, Muslims, Jews, and Christians, are very strong, and that Christians should show respect to the Jewish people because of the old covenant, and to Muslims because of their belief in the God of the Old Testament.

But the Gospel challenges us today,

"What is truth?" That's what Pilate said back to Jesus when He said,

"I came to witness to the truth."

What is the truth? And then we have the non-revealed religions, the major religions of Hinduism and Buddhism in particular. And the church has always said in recent times that something of the reflection of the nature of God is in all major religions, but there's something lacking which is unique to Christianity because of Christ. And this wasn't to say that we should feel superior or anything like that, nothing like that, but that it's fundamental to our understanding as Catholic Christians just exactly what we believe in as we celebrate Jesus Christ the Universal King.

And I think there's two fundamental differences in the other revealed religions, between us and them, that's very important for your understanding of doctrine and your approach to God. And I think the first thing is the very nature of how we access God or come to know God. You know for both the Jews and the Muslims, it's very much centered on law, that God is absolute and you must obey His commands absolutely to show love for Him. And it's attended to with lots of ritual practices that must be obeyed to be a true believer. And we have inherited a bit of that from the Old Testament tradition, that's the basis for the

command around the Sunday obligation and fasting and so on. Although a lot of those have been relaxed, as you know since Vatican II.

But there's a fundamental difference between that approach. Although we speak of law, that we have a response, and that's meritorious. We don't actually believe that you can merit God's love or access God through merit; it's through grace, a free gift given. That's a fundamental belief of Christianity that's different to other faiths, that it is God's movement to us in Christ, a grace-filled action of God, a free gift of which we are free to respond or not. And that response for us is about approaching God through the one mediator, Jesus Christ. And of course, as we saw in the readings today, with Christ's sacrifice, that we unite ourselves with Him in offering ourselves to God, particularly in the Eucharist.

And then, I think there's another fundamental difference. There's many, really, but these are the two profound ones that hit me. And that's our understanding of God's will. Again, for the Jews and the Muslims, God's will is written down. You just fulfill the commands in minute detail as well, and you stay within the bounds of fulfilling God's will. But Jesus is different; Jesus says,

"The kingdom of God is within you."

It's not something out there, and even Moses said this about the law, when he commented on it, it's not something out there that you have to grab; it's here among us.

"The kingdom of God is within you."

And Jesus Himself had to actually understand God's will for Him. It was personal to him... It had to unfold in His life, he had to discover His vocation. And that's the profound thing for us as Christians: We believe that God's will is following your true vocation, your true calling, and discerning what is God's will for me. Not something out there that I must find and I may never know what it is, but something that I must work out to understand through grace, not just the better desires of the better spirit of my nature, but the best. What God has gifted me with, what He's talented me with, and what He's asking me to use these talents for. That's why we have a great sense that God may be calling someone to special vocations like religious life or priesthood.

So God's will is something we discern. Yes, we have the commandments, yes, we have Jesus' teaching to give us an objective purpose, a ruler to measure. But God's will is not just an absolute for everyone. It's my circumstances, my life, my situation. And ultimately it I revealed In Jesus. Don't misunderstand me - I have a great and profound respect for Buddhism, for example. And as the church says, there are little gems expressed in other religions, sometimes better phrased, because we're always working with metaphors and similes in approaching God. And there are tremendous ones elsewhere, but ultimately, it comes down to, which prophet do you believe in? Moses? If you're a follower of Moses, you follow the law. But ultimately, we're presented today with Jesus Christ, the Universal King and Savior. And He is our prophet who shows us the true and living God.