Gandhi said, “Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment, and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment.”

It’s surprising to think about a power obtained through acts of love. We typically think of power as belonging to those who use their brute strength or wealth to force people to do things they may not want to do. Kings are powerful people. Although most of the monarchs we have today are constitutional monarchs, three countries still have monarchs who rule absolutely. These kings use their power to maneuver people to outcomes of their own design and desire and to their own benefit.

Jesus is the King of Kings. However, Jesus’s power is of the second type. Jesus does not rule with an iron fist. Jesus does not use his brute strength to force us to do things we don’t want to do. Instead Jesus is a king who rules through acts of love, most notably through the act of going to the cross. Jesus went to the cross because in doing so he created a path of salvation for us. Jesus our king loves us.

In his actions and words as he went to the cross he also demonstrated his love for his accusers and his executioners. He forgave them. Jesus our king demonstrates for us how he wants us to live as His subjects. He wants us to love everyone, even those who do bad things to us. He wants us to be willing to lay down our lives for our friends. He wants us to love so much that we forgive others. He wants us to live as if living in the Kingdom of Heaven. He wants us, his subjects, to be all about love.

Today is Christ the King Sunday – hence the color white instead of green at the altar. Christ the King Sunday is a relatively new addition to the liturgical calendar. It was instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI as a response to the secularism which was rampant in Europe – essentially as a response to people putting material, secular concerns above concerns for Christ and His Kingdom. He instituted the feast as a response to people putting concerns over money and self-good over concerns of love

The pope wanted the feast to impact how we as a people of God live our lives. He wrote:

"If to Christ our Lord is given all power in heaven and on earth; if all men, purchased by his precious blood, are by a new right subjected to his dominion; if this power embraces all men, it must be clear that not one of our faculties is exempt from his empire. He must reign in our minds, which should assent with perfect submission and firm belief to revealed truths and to the doctrines of Christ. He must reign in our wills, which should obey the laws and precepts of God. He must reign in our hearts, which should spurn natural desires and love God above all things, and cleave to him alone. He must reign in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls, or to use the words of the Apostle Paul, as instruments of justice unto God.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

We are called to serve Christ with everything in our being, as loyal subjects of the King of Kings.

In 1970, the feast of Christ the King was moved to its current place on the liturgical calendar – as the last Sunday before Advent. That move gives this feast end-time implications – implications of the second coming of Christ. The move emphasizes that now, in the time between Christ’s first coming, death and resurrection and his anticipated second coming, we are called to live in ways that represent and further the kingdom. We are called to live as Christ did. We are called to love and to sacrifice for that love. We are called to seek God’s justice and mercy for all God’s people. We are called to create the type of environment – in our church, in our workplace, in our community – in which love – the primary value of Christ’s kingdom flourishes.

There’s an old children’s story that comes to mind as we reflect on the way in which our King Jesus uses power and how we, following his example, are to use power. The story goes like this:

A man was out walking along a stretch of road. It was a cold day, and he wrapped his coat tightly around him.

The sun and the great north wind engaged in a dispute about who was more powerful, and resolved to settle

their differences by vying to see which of them could remove the man’s coat from him.

The north wind blew fiercely, to the limit of his capacity. But the man only clutched his coat more tightly around his

chest. Then the sun came out and shone radiantly down on the strolling figure. Pretty soon, the man removed his coat freely and quickly because of the sun’s benevolent warmth.[[2]](#endnote-2) The benevolent warmth, rather than brute strength, had won out.

In Christ’s kingdom the benevolent warmth always wins out. Love and compassion are the currency of the Kingdom. Jesus the King loves us. We his loyal subjects follow His example and love others.

1. Pope Pius XI, *Quas primas*, §33, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, found on Wikipedia [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. From Synthesis: A Weekly Resource for Preaching and Worship Following the Revised Common Lectionary, November, Year C. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)