

KINGDOMS, CIVILIZATIONS AND DECLINE

INRI. At the top of every crucifix is a short message with those letters on it. INRI. Iesus Nazarenum Rex Iudaeorum. Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews. That was the inscription nailed to the cross above his head. He was depicted as a king, a rival to the great Caesar Emperor of Rome. Such kings don't last too long. But Jesus had been questioned by Pontius Pilate. "Are you a king?" "It is you who say I am a king," answers Jesus, "My kingdom is not here." "Oh, so you ARE a king then?" Jesus: "The reason why I came was to testify to the truth." "What is truth?"

It is almost always about kingdoms and the power associated with such kingdoms.

In the history recorded over the past five millennia scholars, historians and even philosophers have identified around 20 great civilizations or kingdoms that have sprung up, reigned for various numbers of years, declined and vanished. There are 8 characteristics in the dynamic of ascendancy and decline. Briefly they are these:

- 1) From bondage to spiritual growth—people in the crucible battle for spiritual development
- 2) From spiritual growth to great courage—endurance/sacrifice leads to true virtue
- 3) From courage to liberty—the foe (oppression) is vanquished. Agreed upon ideals arise.
- 4) From liberty to abundance—more than enough for all, let's enjoy the fruits.
- 5) From abundance to complacency—turning inward. I'm satisfied. Speak up/get shouted down.
- 6) From complacency to apathy—lost sense of working for common good. What's in it for me?
- 7) From apathy to dependence—lack of personal living virtues or desire to sacrifice.
- 8) From dependence to bondage—increasing centralization of power/less personal responsibility.

We can each do the analysis of the United States at the present time. Are we in ascendancy or decline? But there is more. There is no inevitability to either ascend or decline. We each have personal freedom and we can choose how we live.

The gospel for today speaks of the end-time and judgment. And it is Our Lord Jesus Christ who has been entrusted with this judgment by the Father because it is He who has taken on our flesh and lived our life. He knows everything from the inside and the outside. He sees truly and his Word is a two-edged sword. And what Jesus says is that the judgment will depend on what we did do and what we did not do. It won't depend on whether we lived in a country in ascendancy or decline. It will depend on what we chose to do or chose not to do, no matter our circumstances. The Father's grace, the Holy Spirit, has been poured out over the face of the earth enabling all to live a righteous life even if those around them chose not to do so.

Instead of thinking of Jesus Christ as our king. Think of Him as the Master in your life, the One for whom you choose to live—day in and day out. The One to whom you freely choose to give your allegiance in all things. The One you choose to trust—in all things. The One who inspires your goodness and blesses your good deeds. No matter what country, no matter what civilization, no matter what kingdom we are part of on this earth, we still have our own ability to choose the things we do and do not do.

Christ encourages us in this way. Besides being part of a particular civilization at the present time we are also part of the kingdom of the living God which is always in ascendancy and will prevail because we have the assurance that the gates of hell shall NOT prevail against it. It is for us to keep our eyes on what is true and most important no matter what is happening all around us. We are not determined. We are free, the sons and daughters of the living God. Let us continue to place our trust in the One who comes to us in Eucharist—always. The One whose way opens us to the kingdom that never ends.