SOLEMNITY · SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2026

What Is Christ the King Sunday?

The last Sunday of the Church's year crowns Jesus as King of the Universe. Here is where the feast came from, what kind of king Jesus is, and how to keep the day.

> *"As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."* **Matthew 25:40 · RSV-CE**

On the last Sunday before Advent, Catholics celebrate the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. Most people just call it Christ the King Sunday. It closes the Church's year, and the next Sunday a new year begins with Advent.

The idea behind the feast is simple: the whole story of the year, from Christ's birth to his death, Resurrection and the gift of the Spirit, ends with Jesus reigning over everything. It is the Church's way of saying where history is headed.

Where the feast came from

Christ the King is one of the newer feasts on the calendar. Pope Pius XI created it in 1925 with a letter called *Quas Primas*. Europe was still recovering from the First World War, and new movements were teaching people to put the state, the party or the nation in God's place. Pius XI wanted a yearly reminder that no earthly power gets the final word. Christ does.

At first the feast fell on the last Sunday of October. After the Second Vatican Council, Pope Saint Paul VI moved it in 1969 to the last Sunday of the liturgical year and gave it its fuller title, "King of the Universe." The move tied the feast to the end of time, when Christ comes again in glory.

A different kind of king

When Pilate asked Jesus if he was a king, Jesus answered:

> “My kingship is not of this world.”
>
> John 18:36

Jesus did not come with an army or a palace. He was crowned with thorns, and the sign over his cross read “King of the Jews.” The Catechism says that Christ’s kingship is shown above all in service: he came “not to be served but to serve” (CCC 786, quoting Matthew 20:28). Every baptized Christian shares in that kingship by serving others the way he did.

His kingdom is already present, quietly, in the Church and wherever people live by his love. It is not finished yet. The Catechism teaches that Christ’s reign is already present in the Church but is not yet fulfilled. It will be complete when he comes again in glory (CCC 671). That is why Christians pray every day, “Thy kingdom come.”

This year’s Gospel: the King on his throne

In 2026 the Gospel for the feast is Matthew 25:31–46, the scene of the Last Judgment. The Son of Man sits on his throne and separates the nations like a shepherd separating sheep from goats. What decides it is surprisingly ordinary: feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the imprisoned.

> “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”
>
> Matthew 25:40

The King hides himself in the people who need help. That is the heart of the feast. Honoring Christ as King is not only about words and songs. It is about how we treat the people in front of us. The Church calls these acts the corporal works of mercy, and the Catechism lists them in CCC 2447.

The first reading, from Ezekiel 34, gives the same picture from another angle: God promises to be the shepherd who seeks out the lost, binds up the injured and strengthens the weak. The responsorial psalm is Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd.” This King rules like a good shepherd.

How to keep Christ the King Sunday

- **Go to Mass.** It is a Sunday, so it is a day of obligation. If you have been away, this is a good Sunday to come back. Our guide to your first Mass walks you through it.
- **Pick one work of mercy this week.** Bring a meal to someone, call a person who is lonely, donate coats, or visit someone in a nursing home. Matthew 25 is a to-do list.
- **Pray an act of consecration.** Many parishes pray the Act of Consecration of the Human Race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus on this day. It is a short prayer giving the world to Christ's care.
- **Get ready for Advent.** Next Sunday the new year begins. Set up an Advent wreath and look over the Advent and Christmas page so the season does not sneak up on you.

For anyone exploring the faith

Calling Jesus "King" can sound old-fashioned or even political. The feast means something gentler and more personal. It asks: who or what is in charge of my life? Christians believe the answer that brings real freedom is a King who washes feet, forgives enemies and gives his life for his people. If that King interests you, the Begin Here page explains how people become Catholic.

Keep going

- Advent and Christmas: Advent starts next Sunday. Dates, wreath prayers and an Advent calendar. (catholicdoorway.com/advent)
- Your First Mass: What happens at Mass and what to do, step by step. (catholicdoorway.com/first-mass)
- Holy Days Calendar: Add the Church's feasts and holy days to your phone. (catholicdoorway.com/calendar)
- What Catholics Believe: The core of the faith in plain language. (catholicdoorway.com/beliefs)

Sources

- Catechism of the Catholic Church 668 to 682 (Christ reigns and will come again)
- Catechism of the Catholic Church 786 (Christ's kingship as service) and 2447 (works of mercy)
- Pope Pius XI, Quas Primas (1925)
- Readings for the Solemnity of Christ the King, Year A: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17; Psalm 23; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28; Matthew 25:31-46

Read it online and find more at catholicdoorway.com/this-week/what-is-christ-the-king-sunday. Free to print and share for personal, parish and classroom use. Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Second Catholic Edition © 2006 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Spot a mistake? Write to hello@catholicdoorway.com.