

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, Cycle A  
Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17  
Psalm 23:1-2, 2-3, 5-6  
1 Corinthians 15: 20-26, 28  
Matthew 25:31-46  
Rev. Charles B. Gordon, C.S.C.  
The Garaventa Center  
The University of Portland

“You can't serve two masters. If you try, you'll end up loving one and hating the other.” When Jesus' first listeners heard these words, they thought, “Well, if that's true, I'll have to decide once and for all whom I'm going to serve. And when I've made up my mind, my service is going to have to be whole-hearted and single-minded.” Many decided to serve God.

Today we tend to respond differently to Jesus' words. We don't want to choose one master from among many. *We don't want to serve anybody.* Our instinct is for independence. We want to be masters of our own fate, and won't willingly allow anyone to, “Lord it over us.” That's why modern kings and queens are *constitutional* monarchs, reigned in by laws. History has shown us that when human beings have too much unchecked power over the lives and well-being of others, the consequences are usually disastrous. We aren't the first to learn this lesson. The people of Israel came to the same conclusion. They had begged God to give them a king, like all the other nations had. But with few exceptions, the kings of Israel were miserable failures, and the people paid the price.

Today we have come to value our freedom so highly, that we are tempted to reject even the kingship of Christ. We would prefer Christ to be a kind of constitutional monarch, invited in for solemn occasions like

weddings and funerals, but who otherwise lets us go our own way. This is a case of applying a perfectly sound political instinct, to our spiritual lives, where it does tremendous harm. We human beings simply can't be our own masters. No matter how we deny it, no matter how we fight it, we *will* serve someone, or something. That's the way we're made.

Do you remember that extraordinary parable Jesus tells in the twelfth chapter of Matthew? I mean the one about the person who is freed from a demon. The demon wanders around for a while looking for a new place to stay, and finds none. Eventually, the demon returns to the person from whom it was cast out, and finds its old place unoccupied, swept clean, and put in order. So it goes out and finds seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they *all* go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. It seems to me the key word in this troubling parable is 'unoccupied.' The place in the person that the demon had filled had been left empty. I imagine that when the person was freed from the demon, he or she thought, "Well, at last that's over. Now that I'm free of the demon's control *I'm* in charge. I'll never serve anyone or anything again." With disastrous results.

Our creator has made us for a purpose: to know and love God. We're earthen vessels that can only be filled up by God – locks for which God is the only key. There's an emptiness -- a terrible inarticulate longing in our hearts, a yearning for God that we're always trying to satisfy some other way. We try to quell the longing with money, relationships, knowledge: all the good things of life. But no matter what we acquire, no matter what we achieve, it's never good enough. We're never satisfied. We always want more.

When we cling to the illusion that we can be our own masters, our

life is inevitably blighted by some compulsion. *Something* seizes control of us and becomes our master. Our personal demon might be gambling, drink, food, drugs, or resentment. Even seemingly innocuous things like shopping, or surfing the Internet can come to rule us. Having refused to serve the Son of God, we become the slaves of tawdry idols.

Only by serving Christ, only by accepting Christ as our King, can our otherwise hopeless longing be quenched. Then we can enjoy the good things of life as they are meant to be enjoyed. They won't be our masters. Only if Christ reigns in our hearts and our lives, can we enjoy the freedom and dignity that is our birthright as God's children. And so in this great feast we choose to serve the one king who can be trusted: the one who has already lived and died for each one of us. We serve Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, the one who is and who was and is to come, the way, the truth, and the life.