I HAVE HEARD OF YOUR FAITH IN THE LORD JESUS AND YOUR LOVE TOWARD ALL THE SAINTS, AND FOR THIS REASON I DO NOT CEASE TO GIVE THANKS FOR YOU AS I REMEMBER YOU IN MY PRAYERS.

Today as we come to the end of this Church Year and look ahead to the First Sunday in Advent it is good for us to pause and pledge our loving allegiance to Christ our gracious Lord and King. Remembering His ever-present reign is a great comfort for our daily life. You see, often when Sacred Scripture speaks of God as King and Lord the focus is on the future. For instance, in the first lesson the Prophet Ezekiel surveyed the misery of his people who were scattered among the nations, and he looked forward to the time when God with regal power would gather His people and return them to the land of promise, comfort and justice. He also saw that in the future God, the almighty Lord, would raise up for His people a new and glorious king like David.

In today’s Gospel St. Matthew’s vision of the triumphant Christ, enthroned in glory, and accompanied by a multitude of the heavenly host, is a vision of the future day of judgment and the end of this present age. On that day, when King Jesus welcomes the faithful into the kingdom prepared for them by the heavenly Father, all mankind will know that Christ is King whose glory is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named.”

But that is all in the future! What of the present? Is Christ Jesus King of the here and now? Do you and I daily recognize Him as our sovereign Lord who leads and guides and protects us? In the Epistle for today St. Paul speaks of the immeasurable power that Christ has since His resurrection. It is a power that is especially gracious toward His Church, a power in which the Church in its darkest days can take comfort. Scripture assures us that because of Christ’s reign the Church will continue, despite the strong opposition of Satan, the world and sinful mankind. Now the great wonder of this Feast Day is that God uses us to proclaim that Christ is King over the Church and the world.

The forces of evil arrayed against Christ are all around us. St. Paul was certainly not a stranger to the evil in the world that brings devastation in its wake. He knew the implacable hatred of the leaders of his own people. He knew the peril of Roman persecutions and the corruption the imperial government. He knew the passion of Jewish Christians who opposed the
entrance of Gentiles into the Church on a basis equal with their own. He knew the power of sin his own life and in the lives of others. The evil forces found in our present time are not different in kind from those experienced by St. Paul. They are different in degree because mankind has devised and perfected greater instruments of evil. Guns developed for use in war have come into the hands of terrorists and criminals and deranged individuals and in a moment can snuff out the lives of many innocent people. Medication intended to relieve pain is misused and becomes dangerously addictive, sometimes leading to death. Trucks built to deliver goods from place to place become instruments of death, and they kill and injure everyone in their path. Rulers would rather reduce their countries to ruin and kill and exile their citizens rather than give up their power.

You and I can scarcely deny the evil that is in the world! Evil has always been present, and yet the Church continues to proclaim the kingship of Christ. At its best the Church has done this not by the power of armed force, but by the power of faith and love. In what way can faith and love reduce the power of evil and proclaim the kingship of Christ?

When faith moves us to gather each Sunday and Holy Day for the proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the Blessed Sacrament, when bells are rung and music resounds through this holy house, we are proclaiming our faith in Christ our God and King. We are proclaiming His reign in our lives despite the power of evil in the world about us. The power of evil may well touch our lives, but by faith we know that it will not overpower us. We have faith in Christ our King and we know that we can come to Him and find strength to overcome the power of evil.

Moreover, we do not come here in secret. Neighbors see us as we assemble in Immanuel Church. They see us, and many of them recognize that for us there must be a power infinitely greater than the power of evil in the world. If we truly live our faith they will see it, and they will recognize that we possess a confident peace and joy that no evil can destroy. That joy and peace comes from having an all-powerful King. Never forget that our regular gathering for worship and praise and our joyful, peaceful lives are powerful witnesses to the truth that whatever the appearances may be, Christ the King reigns, and the power of evil cannot prevail against Him.

In addition to faith, the love which we show to one another and to the people with whom we have daily contact is a mighty witness to the kingship of Christ whose grace and mercy inspire us to love and to loving actions.
Among the evils in the world is the exaltation of "I". Number One is all important! I am all important, and my neighbor comes in at a distant second place. To take care of myself I will make any sacrifice, and I will disregard the well-being of others. If someone else suffers as I move on to my goal, it is too bad but necessary, for I must move ahead. The wrong-headed spirit of self-centered actions and goals at times seems all pervasive. This is nowhere more obvious that in contemporary politics. Innuendos, half truths and outright lies are all part of the game. Let reputations die at every word, it does not matter. What matters is my winning!

So common is this evil spirit that our society is amazed when it sees evidence of genuine, Christ-like love. We are capable of such love! At times our loving hearts may be pierced with the sword of evil, but they will not be shattered beyond repair. With power from Christ the King, love can conquer evil. When we reveal it to our neighbors we proclaim that for us Christ, who is the embodiment of love, is our Lord and King. Do something good and kind for someone who has not earned it and does not expect it, and see the impact it has. Speak kindly and with compassion to someone who is suffering and be surprised at the response. Go out of your way for the benefit of your neighbor, and you will be declaring that Christ who always went about doing good is your King and example. Love goes a long way in overcoming evil. Those who see the power of our love will begin to be attracted by our King and conclude that it is better to be subjects of the King of Love than to be slaves of the lord of evil.

When Christ is our King and we lead a life of selfless love, we experience joy, peace and confidence that surpasses understanding. When we love as Christ loves, Christ is clearly the King who reigns over us. When our neighbors see the gladness of heart that comes from love, evil will begin to lose its power and the reign of Christ will begin to become apparent. What a blessing we will be for our neighbors when we enable them to see and worship Christ who is also their King! Amen!