

“Jesus Christ: The Faithful Witness”

Fessahaye Mebrahtu

Sunday, November 21 is the last Sunday of the liturgical cycle this year, celebrated as Sunday of Christ the King. We are reminded that Christ is the beginning and the end, “the Alpha and the Omega.” The Gospel of John starts with that assertion, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Book of Revelation, which is also attributed to John’s authorship asserts that Christ, the Word of God is also the final Word. The scriptures unambiguously tell us that all we are, and all we have belonged to God, “The earth is the Lord’s and all it holds, the world and those who live in it” (Ps. 24: 1). The feast of Christ the King asserts the divine providence in our being.

The image of a King in our era does not have the weight as of the Biblical era or even 100 years ago. Even today, there are many countries that still have kings and queens, but they are in a low profile and their authority is curbed by their national constitutions, as we call them constitutional monarchs. However, the media focuses only on the Great Britain royal family as if that is the only remaining monarchs on earth. For example, the Scandinavian countries known for their “socialist system” have not gotten rid of their kings and queens. Limited by the constitutional monarchy, the role of these queens and kings is ceremonial and symbolic.

In the past, kings and emperors were known for their excess of power and lifestyle. The Ge’ez Rite during its two-week fast in preparation for feast of assumption sings, “Where are the kings of old, adorned with splendor? Fear not death, but you have to be afraid of sin.” Even kings in their glorious powers were subjected to death and decay. In today’s Gospel reading we learn that Christ’s kingship is different from that what people of his time were used to. Pilate’s question, “Are you the King of the Jews?” This question was loaded. First, Pilate as the representative of Roman Caesar, had the duty to keep the security of his part of the Roman Empire; therefore, he had to clarify the legitimacy of Jesus being accused as “King of the Jews.” Second, Pilate is scorning Jesus’ claim as none sensical because he did not meet the least criteria to be a leader let alone to claim as a king. But Jesus’ response was more puzzling, “My kingdom does not belong to this world.” Today, we are celebrating that Jesus’ kingship beyond and above the earthly kingship we are familiar or learnt in history.

Jesus told his disciples that his kingdom prioritizes service of the least over oppressive power, the world is accustomed to. Jesus’ power first and foremost is over evil, sin and death. The book of Revelation affirms us, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, who has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.” We become participants in God’s kingdom through the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins. Our response is to be witnesses of Jesus love to be all, in all and for all.