

# The Feast of Christ the King

Although it sounds ancient, the Feast of Christ the King is relatively recent and its origins are decidedly secular. Pope Pius XI inaugurated the feast in the encyclical *Quas Primas* on the last Sunday of October 1925. The occasion was the result of a treaty he had reached with Italy's dictator, Benito Mussolini. During the 19th century, the pope had gradually lost control of central Italy as its secular ruler. In 1870 a French garrison that had been stationed in Rome to protect the pope pulled out, leaving him nothing but the Vatican. Considered an enemy of the Italian State, the pope was confined to living in the tiny principality.

While they intensely disliked each other, Pius and Mussolini were pragmatists and finally reached rapprochement. The pope ceded his claim to his former territories (the Papal States). Mussolini, in turn, recognized the Vatican as an independent state with the pope as its leader and allowed him to travel freely.

Wily Pius XI, however, wasn't about to let Mussolini get away with claims of supremacy of the state over the Church. What he couldn't accomplish politically he could assert spiritually. By instituting the Feast of Christ the King, the pope put Mussolini on notice that he would not tolerate interference in Church matters. Totalitarianism (Mussolini coined the term) would not extend to the spiritual realm.

Throughout the years of Nazi Germany, World War II and Communism, celebration of this feast was a way of combating state encroachment on the Church. Today the feast can remind us of God's ultimate dominion over everything, and acknowledge that a healthy tension between Church and state benefits both.

After the Second Vatican Council, the feast was moved to the last Sunday of the Church year. In this position on the Church calendar, the Feast of Christ the King also reminds us that at the end of time, all things will be subsumed through Christ into the Godhead.