

Our trust in government and politicians is at an all-time low. I think this is evident by the outcome of this past election. Our trust in business leaders, especially those in the financial industry, might even be worse. And, because of scandals, there is even distrust of leadership in the Church.

We certainly crave better leadership, but do we even know what that is anymore? What is the standard of leadership against which we should compare our leaders, whether in government, business, or the Church?

85 years ago Pope Pius IX had to deal with a global leadership problem that needed a Gospel solution. It was the time of the rise of dictators. The world had seen Lenin take over Russia and was watching Stalin soar to power. It was keeping an eye on Hitler's growing popularity in Germany. Mussolini had already ruled for three years in Italy.

Pope Pius recognized this crisis in world leadership and he was also watching the spread of communism and its replacement of Christianity with an atheistic political religion. He recognized this dawning of the age of secularism as a direct result of the world's turning away from Christ's sovereignty and denying the role of Christianity and Christian teaching in public conversation.

He called this a “disorder,” a move away from the Divine Order.

On Dec. 11, 1925 Pope Pius instituted the feast of Christ the King. In this way the pope was able to present Jesus Christ as the ideal ruler, the bringer of Divine Order back into the world.

For some it is still hard to picture or accept Jesus as a king. Many still have the mindset of a king as someone who is royalty, commands great respect, has unlimited control and power over others. And yes he is, all of that, but in a way that to this day is still foreign to us.

Jesus had no standing army, but he did have followers. He did not sit on a throne but on the back of a donkey. He wore no crown of gold, but one of thorns. He did not use his authority to take life but to give it. He did not set boundaries or entertain only the nobility; he welcomed prostitutes, tax collectors, foreigners and thieves. He did not take advantage of people but spoke compassionately of widows, prodigals, Samaritans and the poor. He did not use the sword of punishment but extended mercy and forgiveness: He did not coerce, he invited, and rather than tax his subjects to pay the debts of his monarchy, he laid down his own life so that the “debt” of human sin would be forgiven. He did not come to conquer but to save.

He was truly majestic when he calmed the sea and commanded the winds. His power was obvious when he fed the multitudes with bread and fish and raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. His authority over the demons that were thought to cause every kind of human woe was incomparable. When he debated with the religious authorities, his superior wisdom was nothing short of kingly.

And yet, today, we celebrate him as king by remembering what appears to be the lowest point of his life. The ways and wisdom of God are hard to understand. As the visible image of the invisible God, Jesus exercises his kingship by making peace through the blood of his cross. It was in being brought low that Jesus' greatness was fully revealed, and in the moment when he appeared to be most powerless, he succeeded in redeeming all of humankind from sin and death.

As he hung upon the cross, and was suffering and dying his awareness of others was so strong that he could extend love, even to the criminal next to him, even to those who crucified him.

And the first person to really and truly realized Jesus as King was but a

nameless criminal who chose to speak the truth. He admitted his crimes and accepted his fate. He embraced the moment filled with shame, pain and awareness that he had brought this on himself. He then addressed Jesus as his Savior: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

This man’s actions were the greatest example of how we should pray, how to become our own living prayer. Prayer is standing exposed before God as we are, speaking the truth, embracing the present moment and acknowledging Jesus as our Savior. The truth can be far from pretty. Like the criminal, we often make poor choices and throw our lives into chaos and disorder. But Jesus has not given up on us. He refuses to give up.

This king does not only reign, this king also changes us by the mere fact of who He is. Even a thief can find himself changed by this leader He is the King who loves his subjects. He loves them to death.