Not long ago I went to see the movie “The Queen,” which is about Queen Elizabeth and Tony Blair in the days immediately following Diana’s death and it focuses on Queen’s struggle to discern the proper course of action in troubled times.

When I was growing up, my mother was enamored with all things British and that included, to some extent, the British monarchy. Books and magazines of British history were always lying around our house. They were full of pictures of castles, medieval towns, heraldry and more.

In the movie Tony Blair’s wife and some others felt that the monarchy was antiquated and should be abolished. Although I can’t explain why, I think that would be a sad thing if it ever came to pass. Maybe it’s my mom’s influence or something I absorbed from all those books and magazines.

Anyway, in the days following the movie I asked people what they thought of the British monarchy and if it would bother them if it was abolished.

The typical answer was “What are you talking about? Who cares?!?” One thoughtful colleague said, “Well it seems like an awfully expensive tourist attraction.”

This lack of interest in the British monarchy isn’t surprising, especially in our country. But it does you pause if you have to preach on the Feast of Christ the King!

Given our modern unfamiliarity with kings, where do we get our understanding of this institution and the men and women who rule and serve as monarchs?
For many of us it comes from what we read, from literature and mythology, from the Old Testament stories of King David, from the legends of King Arthur, and in recent times from Tolkien’s mythology for England: The Lord of the Rings.

Tolkien was a devout Catholic and although the Lord of the Rings is certainly not a Christian allegory or even a particularly religious story, Tolkien’s Christian faith shines through his writing.

His Aragorn, a mythical character in a mythical world is, none-the-less, a very Christian king.

Aragorn is strong and wise, but not arrogant. He is willing and eager to accept the help and counsel of others. He is a genuinely humble man.

His features and his clothes are weatherworn from his tireless travels and struggles to keep evil at bay. It’s a service he willingly renders anonymously without thanks or reward, so that the simple people he protects will not live under a cloud of fear.

While his life is a life of service and toil, he trusts in providence and plays the part he has been given.

Aragorn often had difficult choices to make, sometimes between what seemed to be a choice between helping someone in dire need and the greater good. In just such a situation, Eomer, a captain of Rohan, asked Aragorn:

“How shall a man judge what do in such times?”

And Aragorn answered: “As he has ever judged. Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among the Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is
a man’s part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house.”

Aragorn belonged to the Truth.

In today’s Gospel Jesus comes before Pilate as a most unlikely king. Certainly there was nothing royal in his dress or his situation. Yet there is something about him that makes it worth Pilate’s time to question him. When Pilate asks him: “Then you are a king?” Jesus gives him the most unlikely of answers:

“For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

That truth is the Good News, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

• We summarize it in our recitation of the creed,
• we have been listening to it every Sunday and every feast day of this year,
• and we’ve heard it summarize in our second reading: “Christ loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood …”

How do we pay homage to such a king?

I think Tolkien would tell us to look to Aragorn. Our kingdoms may be only as big as our homes, our places of work, or our circle of friends, but even in such humble settings, we must belong to the Truth and serve those whom God in his providence has given to us.

So in this holy place, when you make a sign of reverence, a bow of the head, a bending of the knee, recall the one true king, and serve him well in whatever kingdom he has put into your care.