

Solemnity of Christ the King (C): Kingship that Sets People Free from Slavery to Sin

2 Samuel 5:1-3; Psalm 122:1-2,3-4,4-5; Colossians 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Parish,

Greetings of peace in the Lord!

The 34th Sunday in Ordinary Time, which we celebrate as the Solemnity of Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe, culminates the end of the Liturgical Year C. There are 51 Sundays in our Liturgical Calendar year, and they are organized into various seasons: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time. The "ordinary" does not mean it is not a special time; hence, all Sundays are special, but the description "ordinary times" means ordered or numbered times.

For the past 51 Sundays, since the First Sunday of Advent last year, we recalled, realized, and celebrated Jesus' salvific sacrifice on the cross and have listened to the Word of God proclaimed in every Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. And now we proclaim this Sunday as the climax of all those Sundays!

Today's Gospel draws our attention to the last moment of our Lord Jesus' earthly life and speaks to us about a particular character of his kingship. He was crucified on the cross between two thieves for claiming to be a king, yet the only crown he wore was braided with thorns. Over his head was written, (INRI) "Jesus Nazarenvs Rex Ivdaeorvm," translated as "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." While hanging on the cross, he was challenged to save himself so the people would believe him as the true Messiah. But he did not give in to the temptation. He did not prove his kingship nor use his power to save Himself.

If we recall the life and ministry of our Lord, he chose to be born to a poor family and in a manger, not in a palace but in a desolate place (cf. Lk 1:26-38; Lk 2:1-14). There was no blaring of trumpets and clanging of cymbals. He could have declared himself King during the transfiguration event in which Peter proposed to build three tents, but he refused to stay; instead, he went down to the valleys and byways (cf. Mat. 17:1-9). He could have claimed his kingship during the multiplication of the loaves; the people saw his power and wanted him their King, but he kept out of their sight (cf. Jn 6:1-15). He could have declared himself King during the healing and other miracles he performed, but he kept himself low (cf. Mt. 8:16-17, Lk 4:40, Mk 1:29-31, Jn. 5:1-6). He concealed what was due to him; instead, he humbly presented himself as a compassionate and humble presence to people!

Our Lord Jesus claimed his kingship when he bent down and washed the feet of his apostles, during which he told them: "the greatest among you shall be your servant" (cf. Jn 13:2-17). He claimed his kingship during the lowest moment of his life. When he was on trial before Pilate, he told Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world (cf. Jn 18:33-38). He claimed his kingship when he was powerless on the cross. This is poignantly highlighted in the dialogue of Jesus with one of the condemned thieves. On the hour of his agony on the cross, he declared and offered the Good Thief his kingdom, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43). Jesus used his kingship not for himself but for others -- to set people free and the whole creation from the slavery of sin! As St. Paul proclaims, "He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14).

While earthly kings rule from palaces, Jesus Christ reigns from the cross. He once told his disciples that the greatest love one can offer is to lay down one's life for one's friend (cf. Jn 15:13). What he revealed about himself through the Gospel tells us that his kingship is not through the power to dominate and control. His is a kingship of love, a love willing to be weak on the cross, a love ready to die, a love that wills for the good of the other. For it is only love that is willing to die that is powerful and life-changing! The kings and queens of this world don't show this type of kingship. They want everlasting dominion from deceit and manipulation and will sacrifice others, but the Kingship of Christ is not like that. His is a kingship that offers one's self, motivated by a love willing to die so that others may live. It is the kingship that we all long for.

Jesus' kingship did not die on the cross. His death on the cross gave us a life of eternal joy with God. All that is holy and beautiful in our Church, particularly the Holy Sacraments, flows from the cross. We are gifted with the privilege to access God's saving and healing power through the holy sacraments, most especially the Holy Eucharist. Undoubtedly, all the good and beautiful in our human nature also flow from the cross. We are invited to ponder the road to be followed if we are to make sense of our lives and open up the vision of a new world. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "May your Kingdom

come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus has already started this kingdom. He is the kingdom! Let us keep Jesus as the head of our household, the unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation. He is our Lord, our King. He is our strength amid the pain that we may go through in life, for he knew pain and conquered death.

I remember a parishioner kneeling and looking at the cross while tears rolled down her eyes. She was praying intently with hands holding the holy rosary. I can only imagine her pain. I only knew later that she was laid off from her job, and her husband left her. She told me, "it's okay, father; I know this will pass. I know it is nothing compared to what Jesus did for me. I trust that God will help me."

To those who are in pain and crying, you can turn to the true King. You will behold his wounds, wounds of love that set people free from slavery to sin. Recognizing Christ as the King of our lives may mean a change of heart and an honest approach to living our lives, like the Good Thief, who cried out, "Jesus, remember me when you come to your kingdom" (Lk 23:42). It is also our cry!

God bless you!

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Pastor