



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, Cycle C

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"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Luke 23:42

On this last Sunday Gospel of the Church year we recall Holy Week. This passage is part of the passion account we heard on Palm Sunday. Today we reflect on the inscription over the head of Jesus as he hung upon the cross. The passage very effectively reminds us that Jesus is not just a king, but scripture tells us he is a *servant king*, and his throne is not what one would naturally expect. *"For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* (see Matthew 20:28)

It is interesting that none of the three gospels used on this feast in the three-year lectionary includes Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. That was the one time he allowed himself to be treated like a king. The lectionary pointedly reminds us that his kingship is one of love, service and sacrifice, not power and domination.

Our king was mocked by the religious leaders, then by the soldiers and finally by a criminal crucified with him. To all of this he makes no reply. Only when the repentant thief asks to be remembered does Jesus respond with a promise of salvation.

The mocking, ironically, proclaims the truth about Jesus, his identity, and by extension the Christian identity. He is reviled and rejected as the messiah of God, the chosen one, the king of the Jews and the savior of the people. Only the *"good thief"* proclaims the innocence of Jesus and recognizes him as a servant king. This is a powerful reminder that a true encounter with Christ goes deeper than human flesh. The mystical encounter penetrates to the very soul, and that is where radical conversion (metanoia) and reconciliation occur. The *"good thief"* had just such a mystical encounter.

By ending with the exchange between Jesus and the two thieves we are reminded that the vast scope of Christ's reign is ultimately exercised in the mind, heart and soul of each believer. It should provoke within us the question: Is he truly my king?

As we reflect on this reading, find the palm branch you were given last Palm Sunday. By now it's dry and brittle, yet ever so meaningful as it is a symbol of the faith you walked all through Lent, the Easter Season, and our time leading up to this Sunday. These branches will be collected and burned, turned into the ashes that will be blessed on Ash Wednesday, and, with the priest or deacon's thumb, will imprint the sign of the cross on your forehead. Reflect on the message from St. Paul on Ash Wednesday:

"Brothers and sisters: We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

2 Corinthians 5:20

How resilient is our commitment and witness after these many months since Holy Week, to our Pilgrims Way of the Cross, as we stand at the threshold of a new year? St. Paul calls us to be *"reconciled to God."* Let us also consider how we are to be reconciled with each other. Let us renew our commitment to be *"Ambassadors for Christ"* in humble service to the Trinity and a world that hungers for the Bread that is broken and shared by Christ that the world might live. This bread is spirit and gift of God's love.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

When Jesus had been crucified, the people stood by watching;
the leaders scoffed at him saying,
*"He saved others;
let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!"*

The soldiers also mocked Jesus,
coming up and offering him sour wine,
and saying, *"If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"*

There was also an inscription over Jesus,
"This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged there
kept deriding Jesus and saying,
*"Are you not the Messiah!
Save yourself and us!"*

But the other rebuked him, saying,
*"Do you not fear God,
since you are under the same sentence of condemnation!
And we indeed have been condemned justly,
for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds,
but this man has done nothing wrong."*

Then he said,
"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus replied,
"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

The Gospel of the Lord