

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Reading I: 2 Samuel 5:1 – 3
Reading II: Colossians 1:12 – 20
Gospel: Luke 23:35 – 43

Today, we, with the entire Church, proclaim our Lord Jesus Christ as King of the Universe. On this great solemnity, as we look back on our year of mercy and look forward to a new year of grace, we are called to reflect on what kind of “king” we actually have. From a worldly perspective Jesus’ kingship is a truly odd, paradoxical one. However, when Christians proclaim Jesus as “king” they make a statement that seems contradictory, perplexing or even absurd but, in reality, one that expresses the truths about the nature of our loving Father God and the identity of his son, both of which are foundational to our faith.

As Christians, in our proclamation of Christ the King, we know that Jesus our Lord is not a worldly, warrior like David who the elders of the people anointed as king over a sliver of middle eastern real estate known as Israel. Rather our king is a universal one, a true, mighty warrior who governs with weapons more powerful than swords.

We know, too, that Jesus is not to be found where worldly kings exist – separate from their subjects in royal palaces or halls of power. Rather our king reigns from a unique throne that touches all life. Jesus’ throne is found even in the dark places of our world – next to the crosses of our lives – shoulder to shoulder with those over who he has authority. Shoulder to shoulder with those who he suffers with.

So, let’s take a closer look at this kingly man/God of ours through the eyes of a most unlikely Christian witness.

As Christians, we know and proclaim that Jesus, the Son of God, the Christ, our Lord is unique in all the ages in his mysterious, universal kingship.

- The angels name him “Jesus” bestowing on him the purpose of his rule – “God saves.”
- His title “Son of God” signifies the unique and eternal relationship of Jesus Christ to God his Father: he is the only son of the creator of the universe.
- His title “Christ” means “anointed one” or “messiah.” Jesus is the Christ, for “God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power.”
- His title “Lord” indicates divine sovereignty. Jesus possesses all power in heaven and on earth. Scripture tells us that he is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion,” for the Father “has put all things under his feet.”

But this paradoxical “king” of ours doesn’t rule with a sword forged of steel. Rather he governs with a weapon that is fashioned far stronger and sharper. That weapon is love and this love is revealed to us in a most unusual place – a cross.

God is love, and Jesus Christ is the revelation – the visible face of the Father’s love. Truly, the incarnate son, by his taking on human flesh, reveals to us the mercy and love of God the Father.

Mercy springs forth from the passion of love. Love for the other urges God to rule in kindness and tenderness, to heal and to save. Pope Francis tells us that love without action is simply a theory or idea. But when made concrete and real – when love is in response to the suffering of another person – that concrete, real response becomes an act of mercy. And the world’s ultimate act of mercy became known to us through the brutal death of a divine king on the throne of his cross.

Here on a seemingly forsaken piece of wood two thousand years ago, mercy arose from the compassion of Christ our King, and with that love, people are healed: the blind see, the lame walk, the suffering know that they are loved and the repentant sinner, like the good thief in today’s Gospel, is saved from a life of eternal death.

It’s through our participation in the last graced moments of the life of a simple, sinful man, the “good thief” – one of the two criminals crucified alongside of Jesus – that we gather a true picture of the paradox of the essence of the Kingship of Jesus.

We know that our Father God, in his goodness and mercy, is the one who saves the lowly and the unworthy. And there is no character in the Gospels who more perfectly captures this truth than our story’s common criminal.

We know almost nothing about this man. We don’t know his name, age or marital status. We don’t know the crime he’s been condemn to death for. We don’t know who in his life may have served to evangelize this “good thief” – to bring him the Good News contained in the man who was dying next to him.

We do know, however, that the broken life of this criminal was coming to a violent and cruel end. From his own lips, this sinful man admits that he had committed crimes for which he is justly being punished.

We see as the story unfolds that, as he was now crucified, the good thief has no more opportunities for life choices that he could make to live his life differently – to live peacefully, forgivingly, lovingly. Death was certain and hope was gone – or was it?

Recognizing his sinfulness and with a *true* repentant heart, the good thief risks opening himself and allows his entire being to be embraced by a man in who he senses love – in who he recognizes divine mercy. In the last

moments of his life, through grace, he recognizes the absurdity of the situation, that a king – the loving King of the Universe – the one who has dominion over all, was suffering with him. This repentant sinner dares to risk his soul because he encounters a God with scars and wounds, one who endures pain, who suffers and bleeds.

Here before the throne of his king, the throne of a cross, this common criminal, recognizing his own guilt and the fitting punishment that it deserves, focuses beyond the apparent hopelessness of his life and through faith humbly asks “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” The criminal recognizes and confesses his sins and then repents and asks for forgiveness. For this he is canonized as the first saint – on the cross by the Lord himself.

The great and holy season of Advent begins next week. While so many will be challenged with preparing for the holidays, Advent gives us the opportunity to begin anew by preparing our lives for all that the promise of Christmas truly contains. And, the good thief of today’s Gospel can help us in our new beginnings.

With this repentant man as our patron, what better time is there to prepare for the king of the universe coming to us in the form of a helpless human baby.

- What better time to reflect on the universality of God’s reign and the weapons of love and mercy with which he governs.
- What better time to cry out with the good thief from our self-imposed crosses – the ones we’ve bound ourselves to by our selfish, sinful actions “Lord, I need you. I’ve messed up my life. Show me the things that I do that separate us.”
- And, what better time to cry out “Lord, remember me. As I turn from my sinful ways, bring me to the joy and happiness of your kingdom.”