

Reflecting on the Sunday's Readings

"Amen I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

11/20/2016 ~ Year C

2 Samuel 5:1-3 Colossians 1:12-20 Luke 23:35-43

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Christ the King

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The trial had ended and Jesus, the Lord of glory, the Lord of lords, the Christ, the Messiah, Our Immanuel, the Blessed Fruit of the womb of Mary, the King of kings, – hung on a rugged cross.

When you think of kings and royalty, what comes to your mind? As for me, I think of crowns and rich robes, servants and food and rich surroundings. Throughout the Middle Ages, the church adopted many of the trappings we associate with people of power. As a consequence, little by little, the church began mimicking the dress, titles and palaces of the princes and lords of Europe. These developments were intended to serve as a constant reminder to secular authorities that the rule of God was more important and more commanding than any human ruler. The thinking went something like this: If a king wears a crown, then the pope should wear a triple crown. Hence, the creation of the tiara, which was eventually retired in the late 20th century.

But in the course of making those changes, many in the church failed to remember the scene so powerfully depicted in today's Gospel from Luke.

Here, there is no jeweled tiara. Only a crown of thorns. Here, there is no gold-plated throne. Only a wooden cross. Here, there are no trumpets blaring, no choirs chanting, no drums booming. Only a stark inscription claiming, **“This is the King of the Jews.”** And yet, today the church celebrates the feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. In doing so, the church attempts to emphasize the kind of kingship that Jesus represents ... a kingship that redefines what true authority in this world really is. It's a kingship that refuses all of the riches common to leaders of the world. It's a kingship that uses language like love, mercy and forgiveness. It's a kingship that can be summarized in one word: *servanthood*.

Today our king is hanging on a rugged cross with two thieves on either side. No scene could make it clearer that Jesus Christ is a very special kind of king indeed. He reigns here from an instrument of torture – the oddest kind of throne for a king. The sign above his head, “King of the Jews,” was placed there to explain the reason for his execution, but the leaders of those he presumed to rule object to that proclamation, “King of the Jews.” All the glory of a king seemed lost as he hung there on that rugged cross with two thieves on either side and it raises an interesting point on how we live our lives.

The first thief just wants Jesus to get him off the cross. The second thief however just wants Jesus to remember him. If anyone was ever worthless, this one truly was. If any one was ever a loser, **he** was at the top of the list. Maybe that's why Jesus chose him to show us what he thinks of the human race. Maybe this criminal had **heard the messiah speak** before. Maybe he had **seen him love the lowly and performed some miracle**. Maybe he had **watched him dine with the punks, tax collectors and pickpockets**, or maybe not. Maybe the only thing he knew about this so called messiah was what he now saw: **a beaten, slashed, nail suspended preacher**. His face covered with dirt and blood, his bones peeking through torn flesh, his lungs gasping for air. Something though, told him he had never been in better or greater company. And somehow he realized that even though all he had was prayer, he had finally met the one to whom he should pray to. ***"Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."*** ***"Any chance you could put in a good word for me?" (loose translation)*** ***"Amen I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."*** ***"Consider it done."***

Now why would Jesus do that? What in the world did he have to gain by promising this criminal a place of honor at the table? What could this thief have to offer besides nothing! But he did have something to offer. He gave Jesus **his faith and belief**. He gave Jesus all he had to offer, **his prayer**. This raises the point, do we want Jesus to get us down off the cross or are we giving him all that we have to offer.

If and when I get to heaven do you know who I want to talk to? I want to talk to the guy who owned the donkey we hear about on **Palm Sunday**. Think about it----here comes some folks that have been on the road, so they are probably dirty, sweaty and smelling. Their clothes probably weren't the best to begin with, and they say, **"Our master has need of your donkey."** If someone like the people just described asked **you** for the keys to your car because, "the master has need of it" you and I would probably say, "get out of here and leave me alone before I call the cops."

But the man with the donkey hands it over without even a question. How did he know it was Jesus who needed the donkey? Did he know who this Jesus was, this so called Master? Did he have a vision? Did an angel appear to him? Was it hard for him to give up the donkey? And how did he feel when he saw Jesus riding on the back of **his** donkey ...To see Jesus, using something of his? Did he have any idea at that time, how his generosity would affect the rest of the world and history?

All of us have a donkey that Jesus needs. It may be our time. It may be our talents. It may be a portion of our treasure. Or maybe just **a smile for someone who is hurting** or

a helping hand for someone in need. Do we let him use our donkey or do we hesitate? We never know how our gift will affect the world. We never know how we will change things, what we do know, is that we should share our respect and love for Our King and Our Savior with everyone we encounter.

But do we do that? When we enter the church are we aware that there is a room on the right side called the **Blessed Sacrament Chapel** where Jesus is waiting for us, and when we enter that room, do we genuflect to the tabernacle, as a homage to the one who gave his life so willingly for us? Do we participate in the mass or do we just sit there wishing it was over even before it has started? When we receive communion, do we show respect and reverence for the True Body and Blood of Christ, or is it just something we do because others are doing it? Do we remain in our pew until after the clergy has left in procession or are we in a hurry to get to our cars just to sit and wait in the driveway? Do we look forward to mass or do we come because it's our obligation? So I guess, what I'm asking is, which thief are we? Are we like the first thief saying, get me down off this cross! Or are we saying I believe in you and I worship you. **"Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom."**

By stretching his arms out on the rugged cross, Christ rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into His Kingdom. **Through him**, we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins." **Christ is our King!** And as we end our Church year, we do so, proclaiming that fact. **Christ is our King!** There are certainly times when we forget that. We can look at the Church and the Commandments and pick and choose what we will believe or do. It is quite easy for us to become King. We might choose other rulers as well ... **power, money, beauty, relationships, fame** and many other things. When the time comes for us to learn about their passing attraction, it's important for us to realize who our true King is. It is **none other than our Lord Jesus Christ!**

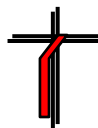
To accept and obey Christ as Lord and King is to enter a kingdom that will last forever where **true peace, righteousness, love, and truth** abide. Do we allow Christ full reign in every area of our life, or do we pick and choose when and where to let him in?

As we continue with our celebration in honoring Christ our King and as we approach this table to be one with him in the Eucharist, let us ask him to be the **Master** and **Ruler** of our hearts and minds, let us ask that his **peace** and **joy** reign in every area of our life and that **his words of wisdom** guide every step that we take. And as always, let us ask the Lord to guide our thoughts, our feelings and our actions.

As we celebrate the last Sunday of the church year we are challenged to decide-who is our king? What are the **goals** and **dreams** that we should really be **working** for and **sacrificing** for? The answer is obvious. **Christ is our Lord and King!** This day, Christ the King, isn't just the conclusion of yet another church year. It's a sign of **our hope, our salvation**. We should never lose sight of that fact-ever. Our hope is in the Lord and when we say, with the **fullest of faith** and **sincerity of our heart**, ***"Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom,"*** he will truly and surely reply, ***"Amen I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."***

The Lord is on watch. He is always near. The Lord is my Shepherd. I walk with no fear.

May God Bless each and every one of you.



Rev. Mr. Peter B. Swan, SR.