

## CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY – YEAR C

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

(Excerpts from Pope Francis – 2022)

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“This is the King of the Jews” (*Lk* 23:38). That is Jesus’ title: he is a king. Well, our idea of a king is turned upside down. What comes to mind is a powerful man seated on a throne, a sceptre in his hand and precious rings on his fingers, speaking in solemn tones to his subjects. Looking at Jesus, though, we see the complete opposite. The God who “casts down the mighty from their thrones” (*Lk* 1:52) appears as a slave executed by those in power. From his throne on the cross he no longer teaches the crowds by his words. He does more: he opens his arms to all.

We come to realize that God went to this extreme, in order to embrace every one of us, no matter how far distant we may be from him: he embraces our death, our pain, our poverty, our weakness. He let himself be insulted and derided, so that whenever we are brought low, we will never feel alone. He let himself be stripped of his garments, so that no one would ever feel stripped of his or her rightful dignity. This is our king, the king of the universe, for he journeyed to the furthest confines of our human experience, entered into the black hole of hatred, the black hole of abandonment, in order to bring light to every life and to embrace all reality.

Brothers and sisters, this is the king whom today we acclaim! His is not a king easy to understand. And the question we ought to be asking is this: Is this king of the universe also the king of my life? Do I believe in him? How can I celebrate him as the Lord of all creation, unless he also becomes the Lord of my life? Right now, let us think about our own personal poverty: “Lord, do you love me with this spiritual poverty and all these limitations?” And the Lord smiles and makes us understand that he loves us and gave his life for us. Jesus never tires of forgiving, never. He always sets you on your feet; he always restores your royal dignity. Where does salvation come from? It comes from letting ourselves be loved by him, for only in this way are we freed from slavery to ourselves, from the fear of being alone, from thinking that we cannot succeed.

Brothers and sisters, let us often stand before the crucified Lord and allow ourselves to be loved, as they did to the good thief. Let us hear, **addressed to us**, the only words that **today** Jesus speaks from the cross: “Today you will be with me in paradise” (*Lk* 23:43). That is what God wants to tell us. Then we realize that ours is not an “unknown God”, up in the heavens, powerful and distant, but rather a God who is close: with tenderness and mercy.

That is our king!

Today's Gospel sets before us two paths: faced with Jesus, there are those who become *onlookers* and others who *get involved*. The onlookers are many, the majority. Seeing someone die on a cross was a spectacle. The text tells us this: "The people stood by, watching" (v. 35). They were not bad people: many of them were believers, but at the sight of the crucified Lord they remain onlookers: They do not take a step forward towards Jesus, but look upon him from afar, curious yet indifferent, without really being interested, without asking themselves what they could do. They would have made their comments, expressed their judgements and opinions; some of them would have grieved, others considered him innocent, but all of them stood by and looked on.

Yet closer to the cross there were other onlookers: the leaders of the people, there to watch the grim spectacle of the end of the Christ. The soldiers, who hoped that the execution would be over quickly so they could go home. There is also one of the criminals, who releases all his rage. They mock, they jeer, they vent their anger. All these onlookers share a refrain that the text repeats three times: "If you are a king, then save yourself!" (cf. vv. 35, 37, 39). That is how they insult him; they challenge him! It is precisely the opposite of what Jesus is doing: he thinks not of saving himself, but of saving them. All those people talk about Jesus, but not for a second do they empathize with him. Those people were indifferent.

Yet there is another path: that of goodness. Amid all those onlookers, one person does get involved: the good thief. The others mock the Lord, but he turns to him and calls him by name: "Jesus". "Jesus, remember me!" is all he asks of the Lord. A fine prayer that each of us can recite daily as a path to holiness. "Jesus, remember me!" In this way, a criminal becomes the first saint: he draws near to Jesus for an instant and the Lord keeps him at his side forever.

The Gospel speaks of the good thief for our benefit: to invite us to overcome evil by refusing to remain as onlookers. Those who practise confident trust, like the good thief, learn *to intercede*; they learn to bring to God what they see all around them, the sufferings of the world, the people they meet, and say to him, like the good thief: "Remember, Lord!" We are not in this world just to save ourselves, but to bring our brothers and sisters into the embrace of our king. It is up to us to choose whether we will be *onlookers* or *involved*. What will I be? All of us think we know what is wrong with society, with the world, and with the Church. We talk about it all day long, but then what do we do? Do we stand with hands in our pockets, as mere onlookers?

Today, let us follow the path that make us servants, in order to reign with him.