

November 20, 2022

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Luke 23: 35-43

The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at Jesus and said, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God." Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews."

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Background:

This may seem like a strange text for the feast of "Christ the King." The people, the rulers, the soldiers, and even one of the criminals hanging on a cross all ridicule Jesus. From their point of view Jesus appears to be just another pathetic Jew caught in the Roman system of justice. He hangs on a cross with his crime posted so that those passing can ridicule him. He is a reminder to everyone of what happens to those who challenge the authority that the Roman governors and soldiers were there to enforce. But as is often the case in scripture, the statement made in ridicule reveals the reality of Jesus, not just a king, but The King.

Jesus does not respond to any but the criminal, who first testifies to Jesus' innocence and then requests that Jesus remember him when he comes into his kingdom. Jesus promises to honor his request. In this gesture of compassion Jesus reveals the authority that is his. The rest of the bystanders with their expectations for the Messiah, the Son of God, and Christ the King remain blinded to the reality of who Jesus really is.

This gospel text also reveals how Luke has developed his gospel, for those who might like to reflect more deeply and appreciate Luke's understanding of Jesus as King. It will be helpful to become familiar again with Luke's description of Jesus' temptation in the desert (Luke 4:1-13):

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me." Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.'" Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' and: 'With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'" When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

As Luke describes the temptation of Jesus, he portrays Jesus as being faithful to God where Adam had failed. By eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, Adam lost his status as the son of God (Genesis 3:1-7), but Jesus refused to turn stones into bread for food even though he had not eaten for forty days. In the creation story, Adam had been given dominion over all (Genesis 1:26-30), but he still longed to be like God (Genesis 2:17; 3:19). In the second temptation, the devil offers Jesus power over the whole world, but he chooses to be subject to God's will for him. In the garden, Adam is told that if he eats of the fruit he will not die. In the desert, the

devil says that if Jesus throws himself off the temple, he will not die but be rescued by angels. Most important here is the last line of the above text: “When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time. Although not directly mentioned, Luke is describing Jesus in these final hours as having the temptations again that he experienced in the desert. Like those of the desert, the temptations here are based on Jesus’ relationship to God: “If you are the Christ of God, the chosen one...” Both here and in the desert, Jesus is tempted to escape death. Those who oppose him propose that because he is the “Son of God” he should not have to die. But Jesus, because he is the faithful Son of God, is obedient to the will of God even to death, death on a cross. His obedience is life-giving, and it affects God’s relationship to the whole world, just as Adam’s disobedience affected God’s relationship to creation.

In celebrating Jesus as King, the church uses a familiar image, in way that expresses spiritual reality. This reality is more significant for Christians than the importance of earthly kingdoms that are based in power over another. Jesus opts for a surrender of power so that the power of God can be revealed. The reality of this kingdom here on earth is revealed in the person of Jesus here in Luke’s gospel and Luke’s Acts of the Apostles. It is also made real for us in the lives of holy men and women who have faced the powerful with the same spirit of Jesus’ surrender here and changed the world forever.

Reflection Questions:

1. Use whatever skill God has given to you and the materials at your disposal and draw your image of Christ the King. Give yourself to this image as fully as you are able. (*If you are tempted to actually do a drawing, please do not read the last question until you have made a drawing.*)
2. What are your favorite church buildings? What about each of them makes them fitting structures for you to be in as you celebrate today’s feast?
3. Why do you think the Church has chosen this text for our reflection on this feast of Christ the King?
4. In our text, Jesus is given the titles “Messiah” and “King of the Jews.” The criminal referred to Jesus as “this man.” What are some the ways you refer to Jesus in your own personal prayer? What do those “titles” say to you about your relationship with Jesus?
5. Jesus did not respond to most of the people in the text. Do you ever feel like you are praying or even calling out to God but there seems to be no response? Does this text give you any insights?
6. How does your drawing speak to the type of God you relate to in your prayer? Is your picture that of the God/King that is revealed in the gospel text for today? Where are you in your drawing? Does the drawing speak to you of aspects of God’s relation to you or the world that were not apparent to you?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from readings for November 20, 2022, Solemnity: Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Elders of the tribes of Israel came to David in Hebron and said: "Here we are, your bone and your flesh. In days past, when Saul was our king, it was you who led the Israelites out and brought them back. And the Lord said to you, 'You shall shepherd my people Israel and shall be commander of Israel.'" King David made an agreement with them there before the Lord, and they anointed him king of Israel.

*Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.
I rejoiced because they said to me, "We will go up to the house of the Lord."
And now we have set foot within your gates, O Jerusalem.
Jerusalem, built as a city with compact unity.
To it the tribes of the Lord go up, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.
In it are set up judgment seats for the house of David.*

Brothers and sisters: Give thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light. 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. His son Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. In him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent. In him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross, whether those on earth or those in heaven.

The rulers sneered at Jesus and said, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God." Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews." Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Excerpts from 2 Samuel 5:1-3; Psalm 122:1-5; Colossians 1:12-20; and Luke 23:35-43

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for November 20th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. This is the Feast of Christ the King, and the last Sunday of the liturgical year. The gospel from Luke includes details from the time while Jesus was hanging on the cross, just outside Jerusalem. Rulers and soldiers jeered at him, while over his head hung the inscription, "This is the King of the Jews." They and one of the criminals crucified with him suggested that if he was the Christ, if he was King, he should save himself. But by not saving himself in that moment, as he could have, Christ, the King, saved all of God's people through all of time instead. Jesus Christ, the King, in dying, created the opportunity for

everyone to live beyond this life. All anyone need do is accept the invitation to believe in Him and follow Him, and the criminal on the other cross became the first example. Rebuking the one who reviled Jesus, the other criminal said, "Have you no fear of God? This man has done nothing criminal." Then he said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied to him, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

The other readings also have references to kings, kingdoms, Jerusalem, and the cross. In the first reading from 2 Samuel, elders of the tribes of Israel came to David in Hebron, reminding him that the Lord had said to him, "You shall shepherd my people Israel." And they anointed him king of Israel. Psalm 122 proclaims, "To Jerusalem the tribes go up. I rejoiced when I heard them say, let us go to the house of the Lord. In the Lord's house are set up judgement seats for the house of David." In the second reading, from the letter to the Colossians, Paul writes, "The Father has delivered us and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption. Through him all was reconciled, making peace by the blood of his cross, whether those on earth or those in heaven."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!