

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
20th November 2022 - Christ the King

Readings (Year C): 1st: 2 Samuel 5:1-3. Psalm: 121:1-5. 2nd: Coloss 1:12-20. **Gospel:** Luke 23:35-43.

In the scriptures Jesus is only called a king in parables, esp. the sheep and goats and in the passion narratives. On the cross, above his head Pilate had written a notice 'Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.'

For the Romans the title 'king' is the reason for crucifying Jesus. It was a neat bit of politics, a ploy to get rid of him, a way to silence his challenging voice. For the Jews it is an occasion for mocking him. Jesus doesn't correspond to their image of a king. Jesus isn't the sort of king they expected.

St John shows us in his Passion how Jesus understands himself as a king. When Pilate asks him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Jesus answers 'my kingdom is not of this world.'

With these words Jesus interprets his kingship in a completely new way. Jesus is a royal personage. But his kingdom isn't of this world. **Jesus has his kingly dignity from God.** So no one can dispute his kingship.

What Jesus says here is a promise for every Christian. We too can say of ourselves 'My kingdom is not of this world. There is a sphere in me over which the world has no power. There is a kingly dignity in me which no one can take from me, my 'inner kingdom.'

The paradox is that it is in his suffering that Jesus speaks of his kingdom. That means that the reality of our own inner kingdom also continues on our way of the cross. At the very point where we are judged and condemned by others, where we are misunderstood, where we are scourged, insulted, made to look ridiculous, there is something in us that no one can hurt.

Where we fail, there is something in us that cannot be broken. Even in our dying the divine dignity cannot be taken from us, and that is why for us a funeral Requiem Mass is the right prayer to speed us on our way to paradise.

The sign with the word 'king' seemed ridiculous even to his friends. His followers wonder how the man bleeding from all over his body, will ever be able to recover, saying to themselves 'how will we ever get over a disaster like this?'

A question not only asked at the foot of the cross: a question asked over the centuries, a question still asked daily throughout the world. How can our world heal the traumas and wounds of war, violence, slavery, ethnic cleansing; racism, child abuse, discrimination, drugs, genocide, corruption, deceit – the list is endless.

St Luke suggests forgiveness as a remedy. Jesus shows forgiveness twice in Luke's passion story.

The first in the verse just before where our gospel began today, and in words we all know so well: 'Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.'

The second when one of the criminals next to Jesus, having rebuked the other says 'Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.' The criminals question is rather vague, 'when you come.'

Jesus reply is very precise 'today' because he knows he is about to complete his mission and usher in God's kingdom.

Forgiveness is the only way we can possibly restore the past and heal the wounds of the present. It is the only way – it is Jesus' way. According to St John, the first thing Jesus says to his disciples when he appears to them after his resurrection is 'Peace' and then adds, as he gives them their commission to spread to good news across the globe; 'for those who sins you forgive, they are forgiven.'

We know it is not easy to forgive: in fact it is impossible if you refuse to acknowledge you ever committed any wrong yourself. When you face up to your own sinfulness and need of forgiveness then it becomes not only possible to forgive others, but also necessary.

Jesus taught us daily to pray ‘forgive us as we forgive.’

When the man turns to Jesus, the foundation stone of the new world is laid. Practically all his followers have left him, but the words on the cross form a bridge between his kingdom and the Earth.

Jesus is truly King of love on Calvary.

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