

## The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe - The Paradox of Christ's Kingship

November 20, 2022.

The Church's year is closing; and we look towards the glorious consummation of God's plan for creation – when the Saviour will '**hand over the kingdom to God the Father**' (1 Corinthians 15:24), having triumphed over all evil, and (as our second reading puts it) '**made peace by the blood of his cross**'. Let us not be put off by the fact that in today's world, 'kings and queens' are no more than symbolic figures. Today we are invited to rejoice in the fact that we have the one 'in whom all things were made' as our leader. The incident remembered in our first reading (2 Sm 5:1-3) when the tribal chiefs of old Israel proclaimed David to be their leader reminds us how important leadership is in our life. All the best things of life, we achieve together. Good leadership makes this possible; bad leadership creates most of the world's greatest problems. We know our Saviour is far more than a symbolic figure; and our faith will be greatly strengthened, if we own him as the leader who can bring fulfilment to all our hopes.

We are gazing at the pivotal moment of human history: Jesus Christ being crucified on the hill of Calvary. From one perspective, it is a disastrous event. It shows mankind rejecting and destroying its creator, saviour and God. And yet, today is the day when the whole Church, throughout the entire world, celebrates Christ's universal Kingship. Aren't kings supposed to be powerful, successful and victorious? So why are we staring at a dying, helpless man hanging from a cross? Because the cross is our King's throne - Christ reigns not from velvet-covered, diamond-encrusted, gold-plated seats, like passing earthly kings, rather, he reigns from the cross. How does this work? How can this sign of utter defeat also be the sign of our King's everlasting victory? This is what Saint Pope John Paul II called the "paradox" of Christ's Kingship. Christ's Kingdom begins in this world, but it is not of this world. It begins in the hearts of Christians like us, his followers, who believe in him and obey him. The Church and the saints are living signs of this Kingdom, as buds in springtime are signs of summer. And so, since his Kingdom transcends this world, it makes sense that Christ's throne is different from earthly thrones. **Christ's Kingdom is built on the unconquerable power of God's unconditional love for each one of us.** On the cross Jesus reveals that love by suffering and dying for our salvation, even while we were still sinners. In the Resurrection he will reveal that unconquerable power. And that's why our King reigns from such a throne.

In St Peter's Square, in Rome, there stands an ancient Egyptian obelisk - a single block of marble almost 100 feet high, in the shape of the Washington monument, and weighing 330 tons. The obelisk was originally erected around the year 1850 BC as a monument to the Pharaoh of Egypt. At the time of Christ, after Rome had conquered Egypt, the Roman Emperor Caligula brought the obelisk to Rome as a sign of Rome's superiority to Egypt. Centuries later, when the barbarians invaded Rome and the city fell into disrepair, the obelisk fell. Ivy grew around it. It was half-buried near the old Basilica of St Peter. But the Church converted the barbarians, and when a new Christian culture emerged and flourished, and St Peter's Basilica was rebuilt and expanded, Pope Sixtus V had the obelisk erected in the centre of St Peter's plaza, where it still stands today. No longer is it a reminder of the long-perished empires of Egypt and Rome and the barbarian hoards. Now it has been put at the service of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Now it is topped with a bronze cross, and inside that bronze cross is mounted a small fragment of the true cross, the cross on which Christ was crucified - his throne. An inscription has been carved on the base of that obelisk, to remind us that this throne is different than Pharaoh's throne or Caesar's throne. The part of the inscription facing out, facing the rest of the world, reads: [Ecce crux domini, fugite partes adversae, vincit leo de tribu judae], Behold the cross of the Lord, let his enemies flee, the lion of the Tribe of Judah has conquered! The part of the inscription facing the Basilica reads: [Christus vincit! Christus regnat!] Christus imperat! **Christ conquers! Christ rules! Christ reigns! Christ the King has conquered indeed, and his Kingdom will last forever.**

**Christ the king reigns not from palaces but from the cross.** His kingdom is not a place, but a people who give their hearts lovingly to him by shaping their lives according to his will. His death on the cross is our signpost to heaven and the road to be followed if we are to make sense of our lives and open up the vision of a new world. To recognize Christ as the king of our lives may mean a change of heart. The Good Thief understood this. The bad thief didn't. The rulers didn't. As Jesus hung on the cross, revealing God's saving love, they sneered and jeered at him. They knew that he had claimed to be the Messiah, the Saviour, the King of Israel, but they could only imagine kingship in earthly terms. Jesus didn't respond to them with an explanation. He simply kept suffering unfairly until the very end. And as he suffered, the Good Thief realized the truth. He realized that there is more to the human story than what we see, experience, and understand here on earth. He realized that Jesus held the key to a Kingdom much greater than any the earth would ever know. He realized that Christ's Kingdom could begin on earth, through faith, hope and obedience, but that it would only reach its fullness hereafter, and so he makes his prayer: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." To that request, Jesus responded. As a true King, he granted the favour. He didn't take away the Good Thief's suffering - **Christ's Kingdom is not of this world - but he gave it purpose: he made it a path to Paradise.** And as the Good Thief hung on the cross, dying, tortured, in excruciating pain, he was happy, because he had placed himself under the King's protection, and the King would keep his promise. **The kingship of Christ is made real by allowing God to do his work in us and through us. It is life-long process involving a daily invitation to conversion.**

Brothers and sisters, **Christ rules from the cross, he conquers hearts through the power of his love and forgiveness, but he doesn't do it all by himself. We are his ambassadors, his soldiers. We are the ones called to carry his cross into every corner of society, so that his love can bring light and hope to those living in darkness and hopelessness. To do this, each of us must carry our own cross with faith.** We must not expect perfect happiness in this life. The cross is anchored to the earth, but it stretches up into heaven - just so, our happiness begins on this earth, when we discover the depth of God's love for us, but it will never be complete until, with God's grace, we reach heaven. In this life we are called to work and to fight, resisting the tug of our selfish nature day after day. We are called to reach out to our neighbours who don't know Christ, who have no purpose in the midst of their sufferings, and introduce them to Jesus. We are called to defend courageously Christian values, even if society attacks us because of it. Above all, we must never limit our faith to our private lives. No, our faith must affect everything we do and all that we are. Because we are followers of Christ the King, we should be more dependable professionals, more self-sacrificing parents, more responsible workers, more active and joyful citizens. **Christ is our King. He died to save us.** As long as history lasts, **this King will have enemies, and if we truly love him, which we do, we will fight them, using the same weapons that he used: obedience to the Father's will, and self-forgetting love of neighbour.** As his subjects, we must take his side in the struggle of furthering the growth of his kingdom.