

Reflection for the Solemnity of Christ the Universal King

In today's short passage from St Luke's gospel, as Jesus hangs on the cross, he is abused from three different sources all asserting that he is a failure. The Jewish leaders "*jeered at him*" taunting him that he has failed to demonstrate that he is "*the Christ of God, the Chosen One*" because he is unable to save himself. The Roman soldiers "*mocked him*" deriding him as an ineffectual "*King of the Jews*"; indeed, the inscription nailed to the cross above his head is a mocking statement to the Jews from the brutal Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, to boldly proclaim that this is what we do to your king – we nail him to a cross. And thirdly, "*one of the criminals hanging there*" denounces him as even more wretched and pathetic than himself because he, the common criminal, never claimed to be anything special whereas Jesus claimed to be a saviour, to be the Christ, and yet his life is ending in crucifixion. As Jesus hangs, dying on the cross, only the second criminal expresses any faith in Jesus as a "*man who has done nothing wrong*" and who still can offer him admittance into his kingdom, a request which Jesus confirms when he replies "*indeed, I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise.*"

Today, on the feast of Christ the King, Jesus is presented not as a powerful, omnipotent king reigning in splendour and majesty but as a weak, broken failure whose throne is the wood of the cross and whose crown is weaved from thorns. His kingdom, as he told Pilate at his trial, "*is not a kingdom of this world.*" He had replied to Pilate's questions by saying, "*If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from this world.*"¹ Only the second criminal, sometimes referred to as the good thief, seems to understand this; the Jews, the Romans and the first criminal do not.

Christ's kingship is not about worldly territory or power, not about worldly wealth or status. Rather Christ's kingdom, as we will hear in the preface of today's Mass is a "*kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace*". Indeed, St Paul in today's second reading describes how Christ "*made peace by his death on the cross*" when "*he reconciled*" with the Father "*everything in heaven and everything on earth*". According to St Paul through Christ the Father "*has taken us out of the power of darkness and created a place for us in the kingdom of his Son that he loves, and in him, we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins.*" This is what's Christ's kingship is all about.

Today we celebrate Jesus as the Universal King, and we are reminded that his kingdom is unlike any earthly kingdom; it is instead, as Jesus himself told Pontius Pilate, a "*kingdom not of this world.*"

¹ Jn 18:36