

34TH SUNDAY YR C. CHRIST THE KING



Luke 23:35-43

35 The people stayed there before the cross watching Jesus. As for the leaders, they jeered at him. ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.’ **36** The soldiers mocked him too, and when they approached to offer him vinegar **37** they said, ‘If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.’ **38** Above him there was an inscription: ‘This is the King of the Jews.’

39 One of the criminals hanging there abused him. ‘Are you not the Christ?’ he said. ‘Save yourself and us as well.’ **40** But the other spoke up and rebuked him. ‘Have you no fear of God at all?’ he said. ‘You got the same sentence as he did, **41** but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong. **42** Jesus,’ he said, ‘remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ **43** ‘Indeed, I promise you,’ he replied, ‘today you will be with me in paradise.’

Other readings: 2 Samuel 5:1-3 Psalm 121 (122) Colossians 1:12-20

It might seem strange that this part of the story of Christ’s passion and death is read on the feast of Christ the King. How is it that this gospel reading was chosen?

The debate about whether Jesus is properly called the anointed king or Messiah takes us to the heart of the drama of the gospel. The leaders taunt Jesus: ‘let him save himself if he is the Christ of God’. The soldiers mock Jesus for claiming to be ‘the king of the Jews’. The truth is proclaimed somewhat ironically by the inscription on the cross. But Jesus did not come to win a worldly kingdom, and throughout his public ministry he was wary of any messianic claims made for him.

It is in the dialogue with the ‘good thief’, the criminal crucified with him who is well disposed towards him, that we come to know the truth about the kingdom of Jesus. His kingdom is not of this world. It is the kingdom of God, where peace and mercy reign, not an earthly kingdom which can be fought over in war and violence.

The heart of the message of this gospel is that Jesus welcomes the repentant sinner, no matter how grievous his offence, into the kingdom, into the arms of the loving Father. This is an appropriate passage with which to end our Sunday-by-Sunday reading of the Gospel of Luke. Jesus has come to ‘bring good news to the poor’ (4:18), and to ‘seek out and save the lost’ (19:10). Those who turn to Jesus come into his company in the kingdom of God.

Have I understood the good news preached by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke?

What will stay with me particularly from the Gospel of Luke?

Let us pray for perseverance as we journey towards God’s kingdom of love and peace.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.