

November 20, 2016 Christ the King Homily: Brothers and sisters, early last week the host of a cable news program asked his viewers a rather provocative question. "If you were King (or Queen) for a day and only a day, what would be your first and perhaps last order of business?" And, please, let me add a second question: "And what if that one decision summed up your brief time as king and ruler of the realm. How would you like to be remembered?"

In Luke's account of the passion and death of Jesus the evangelist presents the Kingship of Christ at the very moment of his crucifixion. And what a memorable scene it is... a scene of mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus exercises his authority as King from the cross, his designated throne. His last official act as King is to pardon the so-called Good Thief. His last act sums up his life and mission as the Messiah.

Some of you may be of an age to remember the Presidential election of 1968, a bitterly fought contest. The two candidates, Richard M. Nixon and Senator Hubert Humphrey, were on opposite poles of the political spectrum and, not surprisingly, disliked one another. Sometime after the election, won by Mr. Nixon, the Senator contracted a virulent form of cancer. The doctors informed him that his condition was terminal and that, medically speaking, nothing more could be done for him except palliative care. Shortly before his death, he received an unexpected phone call from his former foe, Richard Nixon, then President of the United States. Mr. Nixon commended him for his many years of public service and for waging a good fight in the previous election. A Quaker, Nixon assured him of his prayers. The dying Senator was grateful for the gracious call and thanked the president for his words of comfort. Mercy and forgiveness prevailed. They were finally reconciled after many years of acrimonious feuding in the public eye!

It is remarkable that the only one to recognize the true identity of Jesus in today's gospel is a man convicted of a capital crime. He acknowledges our Lord's Kingship. "Remember me, Jesus, when you come into your kingdom" (Lk. 23:42). The other characters of the passion fail to distinguish themselves in a moment of dread and darkness: the crowd taunts Jesus, the soldiers mock him (Lk. 23:36) and the unrepentant thief reviles him (Lk. 23:39). It is the thief who recognizes in Christ the longed-for King-Messiah, not the leaders of the political and religious establishments!

In his reflections on this gospel, the noted Catholic scholar Alfred McBride asks, "What might have touched this criminal who had so little contact with Jesus?" He then offers his own opinion based on the insights of Christian writers of earlier generations. "Christian imagination has suggested that he was housed with Jesus in the detention cell during that final night. In those hours of silence next to the Son of God, preparing for death, the man was profoundly affected by the witness of Jesus. There was a depth of spirituality about him that reached his own heart".

Dear brothers and sisters, at the end of our days, each one of us will encounter the crucified Christ. At a time known to God alone, the mysterious shadow of the cross will fall on us. May Our Blessed Lord prepare us for that time of crisis. May our faith in Him never waver! And like the Good thief, let us then gaze upon the face of our merciful Lord who suffered for us and with us. As one close to death in the recent past, I can fully identify with this poignant and moving scene as told by the great storyteller, St. Luke. Let us pray that we imitate the Good thief at the

hour of our death: first, that we confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, second, that we are courageous in admitting our own sins by saying "Guilty, O Lord. I am guilty", and third to repeat over and over again the last words of the Good Thief, "Remember me, Jesus".

As we would expect from the evangelist, the gospel reading ends on a high note, further evidence that the gospel is indeed the "good news". "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43). The words of Christ are a fitting conclusion to the end of the church year. In a spirit of faith, we can all anticipate a blessed ending.

Amen!