



Scripture

2 Samuel 5:1-3; Colossians 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-42

Christ the King Sunday kicks off the final week of Ordinary Time; and perhaps this scene in the Gospel might remind you more of Holy Week than the celebration of Jesus Christ as King. But that's just it! Christ is no ordinary King. It is usually the king's loyal subjects who are dying on the battlefield to save the life of the king. Here, the King is dying for the life of his subjects, who just happen to be sinners and therefore not all that loyal. In the biblical days, mockery aimed at the king could very well mean death for the mocker. Here, mockery is aimed at the King with statements like: "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen One, the Christ of God" - and - "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." In this case, not only will the mockers not be executed, but the King is being executed to save the lives of those who are like these mockers - in other words, sinners. Could Christ have come down from the Cross? Absolutely! Then why didn't he? It was not the nails that held him to the Cross. Rather, it was his love for you and me. He sacrificed himself to defeat an enemy that we, left to ourselves, would never be able to overcome - Death. Earthly kings have servants; our heavenly King, however, was a Servant. Earthly kings sit on a throne in all their glory - that is until they are overtaken or deceased. Our heavenly King also sits on a Throne, but in eternal glory; and what really makes our heavenly King so special beyond human logic is that he has secured eternal glory for his people, sinners that we are. It seems fitting to reiterate what was written in the First Reading's commentary: "My thoughts are not your thoughts; nor your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8). Who really understands this immeasurable love freely given by Love himself! A wonderful sense of hope is given to us in this Gospel because Jesus promises Paradise to the repentant criminal. Something else in this scene could also leave one with a sense of hope which perhaps isn't as strong as the former but nevertheless does shed at the very least a dimmer ray of hope. The repentant criminal reminds the reviling criminal and really all of us - of the condemnation we could be subject to. What does the reviling criminal see when he looks at Jesus after hearing that promise of Paradise given to the repentant criminal? Does he see that Divine Love which cannot be explained by mere words? Does he see hope for himself even after he tempted God? What we do know is that Jesus does not condemn him in this Gospel scene. At the funeral of Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev, Victoria Petrovna, the wife of Brezhnev, traced the Sign of the Cross on her husband's chest as the casket was about to be closed to begin the state funeral service. This was quite remarkable for an empire that embraced the principles of atheistic socialism. But Victoria Petrovna held fast to that virtue of hope. She trusted that a boundless God could produce redemptive grace that also knew no bounds. Original sin dealt us a nasty blow. We want the bad guy to get what he deserves. But the kind of love that we operate with has boundaries on all sides; and we're quite good at deciding for ourselves who should reside within those boundaries. But making God number One in our lives and trying to grow closer to him by means of persistent efforts at climbing the often rugged terrain of the spiritual mountain could indeed begin to punch holes into those boundary walls. It's quite natural from a human perspective to assume that the criminal pretty much made his reservations for hell by reviling Jesus. On the other hand, what he witnessed in the exchange between Jesus and the repentant criminal may have triggered the beginning of his own conversion. And since Jesus doesn't even so much as lecture this man in this scene, could it be because our Omniscient God could see changes for the better awaiting this man?



From the Catechism...

Jesus as Teacher and Savior

537 Through Baptism the Christian is sacramentally assimilated to Jesus, who in his own baptism anticipates his death and resurrection. The Christian must enter into this mystery of humble self-abasement and repentance, go down into the water with Jesus in order to rise with him, be reborn of water and the Spirit so as to become the Father's beloved son in the Son and "walk in newness of life"

538 The Gospels speak of a time of solitude for Jesus in the desert immediately after his baptism by John. Driven by the Spirit into the desert, Jesus remains there for days without eating; he lives among wild beasts, and angels minister to him. At the end of this time Satan tempts him three times, seeking to compromise his filial attitude toward God. Jesus rebuffs these attacks, which recapitulate the temptations of Adam in Paradise and of Israel in the desert, and the devil leaves him "until an opportune time"

539 The evangelists indicate the salvific meaning of this mysterious event: Jesus is the new Adam who remained faithful just where the first Adam had given in to temptation. Jesus fulfills Israel's vocation perfectly: in contrast to those who had once provoked God during forty years in the desert, Christ reveals himself as God's Servant, totally obedient to the divine will. In this, Jesus is the devil's conqueror: he "binds the strong man" to take back his plunder. Jesus' victory over the tempter in the desert anticipates victory at the Passion, the supreme act of obedience of his filial love for the Father.

542 Christ stands at the heart of this gathering of men into the "family of God". By his word, through signs that manifest the reign of God, and by sending out his disciples, Jesus calls all people to come together around him. But above all in the great Paschal mystery - his death on the cross and his Resurrection - he would accomplish the coming of his kingdom. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." Into this union with Christ all men are called.

545 Jesus invites sinners to the table of the kingdom: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." He invites them to that conversion without which one cannot enter the kingdom, but shows them in word and deed his Father's boundless mercy for them and the vast "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents". The supreme proof of his love will be the sacrifice of his own life "for the forgiveness of sins".

554 From the day Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Master "began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things. . . and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Peter scorns this prediction, nor do the others understand it any better than he. In this context the mysterious episode of Jesus' Transfiguration takes place on a high mountain, before three witnesses chosen by himself: Peter, James and John. Jesus' face and clothes become dazzling with light, and Moses and Elijah appear, speaking "of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem". A cloud hid him and a voice from heaven says: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

"The whole of Christ's life was a continual teaching: his silences, his miracles, his gestures, his prayer, his love for people, his special affection for the little and the poor, his acceptance of the total sacrifice on the Cross for the redemption of the world, and his Resurrection are the actualization of his word and the fulfillment of Revelation"



Word Wise

Alpha & Omega

The first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet (Alpha and Omega) were adopted in early Christianity as a monogram for Christ as these signified the beginning and the end. Christ was before all things and shall be after all things.

Son of God

In the Old Testament, this term was used to refer to any man who was perceived to have a close association to God or as holding authority from God. In the New Testament we see this term being applied almost exclusively to Jesus Christ. A parallel can be drawn to the Old Testament in that Jesus has the association and holds the authority, but is referred to as “*the* Son of God” rather than “*a* Son of God”.

Son of David

This is primarily a messianic title, or a title used to proclaim Christ as the Savior. In the Old Testament, God had promised David, the first rightful king of Israel, that his throne would be established forever. Because the kingdom of Christ is eternal, this proclamation of Christ as the Son of David affirms what God had promised. Christ is referred to as the Son of David in many places in the New Testament, perhaps most notably as he is entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and the crowds shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David”.

The Word

The mystery of God incarnate; the Word who is fully one in godhead with the Father, became man without ceasing to be fully God. The Word of God is Himself the Person of the flesh He assumed; He became what we are, except for sin. As God and man in one Person, Christ accomplishes a redemption that fully heals and saves the entire world and us.

Nicene Creed

The profession of the Christian Faith common to the Catholic Church, to all the Eastern Churches separated from Rome, and to most of the Protestant denominations. There was a period of time in the early Church when a dispute over the Trinitarian belief of God as three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) threatened to split the Church. A council of Bishops met in Nicea and drafted this creed that proclaims a belief in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit along with a belief in one Church, one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the belief in life in the future kingdom of Christ.

Sign of the Cross

Most commonly and properly the words "sign of the cross" are used of the large cross traced from forehead to breast and from shoulder to shoulder, such as Catholics are taught to make upon themselves when they begin their prayers, and such also as the priest makes at the foot of the altar when he commences Mass with the words: "In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti" (In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit). It is a sacred reminder of Christ's death on the cross for salvation and a validation of our Trinitarian belief. It is used as a blessing at various points within the liturgy by both the celebrant and the participants and is used in blessings outside of the Mass as well.



Lord

In Hebrew “adonai”, in Greek “kyrios”. In the Jewish scriptures these words referred to Yahweh as the name revealed to Moses was never spoken aloud by a devout Jew. These titles emphasize the dominion of Yahweh and the subordination of the one who is in relationship with him. The use of kyrios in the gospels reflects a cultural shift in Jesus’ time. When Jesus is called “lord” in the gospels, the Aramaic original would have meant no more than “sir”, a polite or formal way of addressing a man. These are not professions of faith in the gospel. However as the Christian community developed in the Apostolic period, Christians reclaimed the usage of Lord as one who has dominion over the believer, and with whom the believer entered into a dynamic and life changing relationship.

The Creed is the statement of faith which has embodied the beliefs of the Christian faithful since the first century. The Nicene Creed is the one used in the public worship of the Church and the Apostles Creed is used in devotional life and personal prayer. The primary purpose is to enunciate what we believe about the nature of God, Jesus, the Trinity, salvation and the community we call the Church. The following is the summary of faith from St Irenaeus and is dated at 190 A.D.

The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: She believes in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus our Lord, and His future manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father “to gather all things to one” and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus our Lord and God and Saviour and King according to the will of the invisible Father, “every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess” to Him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all; that He may send “spiritual wickednesses”, and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, the unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire, but may in the exercise of his grace confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept his commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning of their Christian course, and others from the date of their repentance and may surround them with everlasting glory.

Remember to read the scripture readings for the 1st Sunday of Advent, Year A which are found on p.3 in your Catechumen’s Companion. Use your journal to record any reflections or questions you may have about the readings.