

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Mark 11:9, 10

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come!

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 23:35-43; L162C

The rulers sneered at Jesus and said,

“He saved others, let him save himself

if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God.”

Even the soldiers jeered at him.

As they approached to offer him wine they called out,

“If you are King of the Jews, save yourself.”

Above him there was an inscription that read,

“This is the King of the Jews.”

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying,

“Are you not the Christ?

Save yourself and us.”

The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply,

“Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation?

And indeed, we have been condemned justly,

for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes,

but this man has done nothing criminal.”

Then he said,

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

He replied to him,

“Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

Though we repeat it at church often without thinking, it can be odd to call Jesus, “King.” There are not many kings or queens today and those that do exist are usually figureheads. Perhaps the most famous is Queen Elizabeth II. When we call Jesus a king are we equating him in some ways with a figure like Queen Elizabeth II? Or is the queen in some ways equivalent to Jesus? Jesus has many titles in Scripture, one of which is Christ (Messiah, the Anointed), others are Lamb of God, the Alpha and the Omega, Lion of David, Savior, Lord, Son of

God, Son of Man, and King. Of course, today’s reading tells us that he was given the title “King” by Pilate, or at least by the Romans who crucified him, as they were the ones who would have had the authority and responsibility for placing any sign above the cross.

What is a Christian response to the Romans calling him “king” in such a mocking, derisive way? Christians embraced it and said he was king in a way unlike earthly kings, for his kingdom was not of this world. Even the thieves crucified alongside him encouraged him to save himself if he really is the Anointed One (Christ, Messiah). But again, his kingdom is not of this world. What he does have he offers the repentant thief, “[T]oday you will be with me in Paradise.”

The true king of a kingdom not of this world offers repentance, forgiveness, and paradise to those who seek it. The suffering encountered in this world will be reversed and overcome in the next. The one dying on a cross is destined for paradise. The authorities of this world are putting to death the king of the kingdom of God. But this king will upend the ways of the world.

We proclaim Jesus as king, but he is no mere figurehead. He rules a kingdom of God where justice reigns, the lowly are raised up, and the mighty brought low. Those who hunger and thirst are satisfied whereas the rich are sent away empty. Is this our king? Are we subjects in this kingdom? Or are we more content being subjects of the kingdoms of this age? Jesus is our king, the crucified, humiliated one whose destiny is paradise. Let us align ourselves with him and all the poor and lowly in the world.

Living the Paschal Mystery

The two thieves on either side of Jesus have remarkably different attitudes toward Jesus. One reviled Jesus, prodding him into saving himself and them. The mockery from the bystanders wasn’t enough. Jesus faced mockery from one of his fellow condemned criminals. The other placed faith in Jesus with a simple request to “remember me when you come into your kingdom.” That request belies a faith statement that Jesus is a king. What was said in mockery on the cross is true, and the thief knows it. Not only will Jesus remember him, but he promises to be with him in paradise that day. There seems to be no “descent into hell” in Luke’s understanding. That very day Jesus and the thief will be in paradise.

Our call is to recognize Jesus’ kingship as well, though knowing it is a kingdom not of this world. The paschal mystery gives us hope that upon death Jesus is in paradise without a pit stop along the way. Death leads to new



life. And Jesus will bring others with him as they too experience the paschal mystery.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

To the point: In Jesus' final moments on the cross he is surrounded by people calling out, "Save yourself." The rulers, soldiers, and even one of the criminals being crucified at his side repeat this taunt. In their words we might hear an echo of the temptation Jesus underwent at the very beginning of his ministry, when the devil asks him to change rock into bread to sate his hunger, or to throw himself from the parapet of the temple and be saved by angels. Jesus refuses, of course. Our king is not interested in saving himself. Throughout his ministry Jesus multiplies bread and fish to satisfy the needs of others. He heals physical and spiritual maladies. The second criminal understands and makes a request Jesus immediately grants, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus lives a life poured out for others from the very beginning to the very end. Even now our king stands ready, not to save himself, but to save us.

Connecting the Gospel

to the second reading: Today's second reading is taken from St. Paul's letter to the Colossians. In a hymn about the person of Jesus, Paul writes, "For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, / and through him to reconcile all things for him, / making peace by the blood of his cross / through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven." In our world of divisions and categorizations, Paul invites us into a vision of Jesus as whole: the one in whom all the fullness was pleased to dwell. The one who takes all into himself and transforms it, reconciles it through the blood of his cross.

to experience: When we proclaim Jesus as king of the entire universe, we proclaim him king in fullness—king of the vulnerable harshness of the cross just as much as he is king in the transcendence of the resurrection.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: In the first reading David is crowned king of Israel. The people claim him a family member, shepherd, and ruler. David will govern his people and also lead them spiritually. His home is Jerusalem, the seat of the king, and it becomes the place to be close to God when David's son Solomon builds a temple there. In today's psalm Jerusalem is praised as the center of pilgrimage to draw near the Lord. The temple is "the house of the Lord," a place of justice, and a place of thanksgiving.

to psalmist preparation: Unlike the Israelites before the destruction of the temple in the first century, we don't claim a geographical place as the center of our worship. Jesus, the king of the universe, is found in creation, in community, in the Eucharist, in our hearts. Where do you go to draw close to the Lord? Where do you meet your king?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

David is called by God to be a "shepherd" and a "commander." How do you balance authority with service and compassion, as a shepherd might lead his sheep?

Psalm 122 begins "I rejoiced because they said to me, / 'We will go up to the house of the LORD.'" How is your worship of the Lord joyful?

Read the hymn from Colossians (1:15-20) slowly. Which phrase about Jesus speaks to you the loudest at this moment in your life of faith?

On this feast of Christ the King of the Universe, why do you think the church would choose for us to read and meditate on Jesus' crucifixion?