

SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST, THE KING OF THE UNIVERSE
WHEN LOVE IS KING

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom’ ‘Indeed, I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise’” (Lk. 23: 42-43)

The Unusual King: Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe, the occasion at which we proudly present Jesus to the world as our King, our Lord and our Saviour. As I reflect on the theme of the Readings, especially the Gospel (Lk. 23: 35-43), my mind goes back to the recent passage of Queen Elizabeth II and the coronation of King Charles III. I recall very vividly the lavished display of royal adornments, the expensive regalia, the regal protocols, the military precision, and the august visitors that graced the occasions. There was no doubt that she was a queen and that he is a king. In contrast, Jesus Christ, our King, has no crowd to cheer Him but a few friends who denied and betrayed Him, no throne to sit on but the wood of the Cross to lay his head, no adornments and regalia, no shoes on His feet, no ring on his finger. He has nothing to show except to die on the Cross. Pope Francis wraps up this contrast and paradox so beautifully in these words:

“The Christ of God, the Chosen One, the King” (Lk 23:35,37) appears without power or glory: he is on the cross, where he seems more to be conquered than conqueror. His kingship is paradoxical: his throne is the cross; his crown is made of thorns; he has no sceptre, but a reed is put into his head; he does not have luxurious clothing but is stripped of his tunic; he wears no shiny rings on his fingers, but his hands are pierced with nails; he has no treasure but is sold for thirty pieces of silver.”

The King With A Difference: “My kingship is not of this world” (18: 36), He told Pilate. And truly, His kingship was different from what obtains in our world. He was a quintessential King-servant, who came “to serve and not to be served” (Matt. 20: 28; Mk. 10: 45), who washed the feet of His disciples (Jn. 13: 1-7); and offered His life so that we may have life in full and to save us all (Jn. 10: 10). His kingdom is a kingdom of “redemption, and forgiveness of sins,” (Col. 1: 14). And since “there is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood,” (Heb. 9: 22) He pays the price for them with His Blood. Thus, the King pays for the sins of His subjects “to make peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1: 20).

The People: St. Luke writes: “The people stood by watching” (Lk. 23: 35). The said nothing, did nothing. They simply “stood by watching.” They were having a show. You can imagine what the Social media would have been in today’s world

with the little cameras in our palms. This was the climax of indifference. The same people who were pressing on to touch Him, be cured by Him, and be fed by Him were now mere passive spectators at the hour of His Death. Sometimes, we can be tempted to stand afar off, to sit on the fence and peep through the window at some trying times. As Christians, each of us is called to identify with Him as our King in every life situation. There is no excuse for apathy; no reason to keep off from the weak, the poor, the needy and the least of our brothers.

Others in the Crowd: In the crowd were the leaders of the people who “sneered at Jesus.” The soldiers who “jeered at Him.” And the thief on the left. They all mocked and provoked Him saying “Come down from the cross.” This line recalls the temptation at the beginning of His ministry when the devil challenged Him: “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down” (Matt. 4: 6). This is a direct temptation at the person, identity, and dignity of Jesus. It is a very difficult temptation not overcome because it hit at one’s ego, pride, and self-love. But Jesus was not the one to fall here. Jesus did not throw Himself down then and did not get down from the Cross because were against the Will of the Father. Jesus did not react; he said no word neither to explain nor to defend. His mind was set on the Father’s will, which was to die on the Cross so that His love may save us all. Whereas the kings of this world kill their subjects to live in office, our King accepts to die so that His subjects may have life and have it in full (Jn. 10: 10).

The Repentant Thief: He was a criminal who, according to the ruling law, deserved to die. But unlike the others, he acknowledged the innocence of Jesus. But more than that, he knew he saw what no one else could see – that beside him was the King, the Messiah, the Son of God. And so, he prayed; “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Lk. 23: 42). And Jesus replied: “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23: 43). Why not Jesus remembered that He had promised that “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge him before My Father in heaven” (Matt. 10: 32); “Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple of mine, will not go unrewarded” (Matt. 10: 42; Mk. 9: 41). The thief on the left was not ashamed to stand in defence of Jesus at His loneliest times; he had no water to offer but he offered solidarity to Jesus during this cruel abuse. This is a challenge for us to take a stand and not follow the crowd. In this world of indifference and rejection of Christian ethos, we are invited to make that courageous choice. Sometimes, ours may be the only voice, and there may be a price to pay, but not without a prize from our King.

My dear friends, today we celebrate our King, nay the King of the Universe, whose life was modelled on perfect love. He came into the world because of

God's love for us; He lived each day for the love of us; He died in love to save us all. This is our challenge, to love and not count the cost. Only in and through love are we able to be true kings after the example of our King. Recognising His Kingship, let our prayer be: "Jesus, remember me in your kingdom" (Lk. 23: 42).