



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Christ the King

This day you will be with me in paradise

Readings: Samuel 5: 1-3, Ps 121, Colossians 1: 12-20, Luke 23:35-43

There can be few more pathetic sights or sounds to the non believing mind and ear than this picture of Christ, in extremis, being appealed to by this naked dying thief. What possible kingdom can the thief have imagined would be at the disposal of this beaten, tortured, politically ruined near corpse that was hanging on the adjacent tree? What prospect of redemption, joy, restoration, fulfilment can he have seen in the torn hands and feet? What reality of power and transformation can he have glimpsed in the bleeding thorn crowned brow? Where was the might and glory to be seen in the rocking, gasping, suffocating body of Jesus?

We cannot know. All we do know is that somehow, in the miraculous gift of faith, this condemned man, Christ's last companion in the ranks of the dying, saw enough to make the simple petition of belief and to receive the answer that every soul longs to hear as the curtain falls on this mortal life. 'This day you will be with me in Paradise.'

What the dying and, critically, penitent thief saw was, of course, what Christians ever since have seen in this scene of Calvary but in the light of the Resurrection.

Here, where death appears to have its final triumph, death is finally overthrown. Here where the enemy seeks to murder the God, against whom he has fatally rebelled, the divine life will enter the very fortress of Hell and shatter its gates and lead out Adam and Eve and their generations of the lost. Here where mortality is most deeply exposed and reduced, God Himself has glorified it and raised it to His right hand on high.

So it has been throughout the succeeding centuries that the Christian, when he looks at the crucifix, understands the price of sin, comprehends the agony of death, gazes upon his own inevitable fate. But, like the penitent thief he sees so much more. He sees the triumph of God and the high road to his own salvation and that of all the world who will pass this way and pray this simple petition, 'Remember me when you come into your kingdom'.

He will see the Kingdom of God and he will see Christus Rex, Christ the King reigning from that tree. He will see the mystery of the Tree of Death that has become for him the Tree of Life. It is the Tree he, in Adam, so foolishly passed by in Eden and preferred the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil with all the baleful consequences that attend upon sin and obedience. When the Christian sees the Crucifix he sees the throne from which the Kingdom was inaugurated and from which, in its sacrificial love, it is governed. He will see the unconquerable power of God. Where the Cross of Christ is revealed the darkness rages at its own defeat.

When the priest circumnavigates the altar at the holy Mass he will pause with the thurible and honour the crucifix with the sign of incense, acknowledging the Great High Priest Himself and watching the smoke rise as the prayers of all the saints to the altar of Heaven. This is the Kingdom for which we pray daily in the Lord's Prayer.

This is the King whom we serve, the king who has deigned to share our living and our dying. This is the eternal king who has come to dwell in time. This is the immortal king who has put on our mortality and thereby transformed our fragile humanity into His divinity. This is the One whose life from Annunciation to the Crowning of Our Lady and the Saints passes around the circle of the Rosary and is begun and completed on the Crucifix, the mystery that holds the key to all the others.

This is the year end of the circle of the Christian year and it ends with Christ the King reigning in glory.

Our hope, our faith is no different from that of the dying thief. Every child of Man will pass through death. When we come to the Calvary there are two crosses either side of Jesus. One is occupied by the bitter railing of the man, facing his own death, who holds Christ in contempt. The other is adorned by a penitent sinner whose last prayer is to be remembered by Jesus.

In the end each man must choose the cross he will die on. One leads to the abyss. The other leads to the Kingdom.

Christus Vincit. Christus Regnat. Christus Imperat.

Christ conquers. Christ reigns. Christ commands.

May his Kingdom come to be known by all men and may they kneel before His Cross where love and sacrifice reign in eternity and where, alone, they will surely find salvation.