

Homily for feast of Christ the King, Nov. 20, 2016
Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Sacramento

The Gospel reading brings us close to Christ the King, Christ the crucified King. We are standing on the hill of Calvary as he is humiliated by his tormentors.

Repeatedly they taunted him, "Save yourself," believing that he could not since He had been brutally bound to the cross with nails. The blood flowed from the wounds where the nails had pierced his hands and feet. From the crown of thorns on his head blood flowed down over his face. It trickled down his tortured body and dripped upon the ground surrounding the cross.

Jesus would not save himself. Instead, he offered himself to save us. He was the king who died to save His people. He, who was the Lord of all creation, created a new people with His own blood. A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation was created from the streams of blood flowing from His wounds.

This is why we should contemplate the crucified Christ, our crucified King. The repentant thief, the sorrowful sinner was the only one who recognized who Jesus was. He recognized Jesus as the just one, the suffering servant of God.

Imagine what the repentant thief saw. He saw the Lord's suffering. He saw the pain that he endured. But, he also saw

something more. Even in the humiliation of Jesus, he recognized a power that was greater than that of the Roman authorities who had tortured Him, more commanding than of the religious rulers who had condemned Him. Through the wounds, the bruises, the blood, and the pain that sorrowful sinner saw the power of the mercy of Jesus and he dared to ask, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

He spoke to Jesus in a personal way. He called him by name, "Jesus, remember me." This nameless criminal had a burning desire, greater than even the pain he himself endured, to be with Jesus, to remain with him. He begged Jesus, "Save me." The Lord Jesus, the merciful King, looked at him and said, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." In that instant the words of St. Paul in the second reading were fulfilled, God "delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Col. 1.12-20)

Today, we bring to a close the Jubilee Year of Mercy. This has been an extraordinary time for us to rediscover the power of the mercy of Jesus. The Holy Father, Pope Francis, has helped us understand that the mercy of Jesus is the mission of the Church. The mercy of Jesus is the truth and power of the disciples of Jesus. We have received the mercy of the Father

from the crucified Christ and so we are called to merciful like the Father by imitating the crucified Christ.

This Year of Grace ends with a mission that should never end, the mission of mercy. St. Paul told the Galatians, “Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all, but especially to those who belong to the family of the faith.” (Gal 6:9) In doing good, we continue the saving work of Jesus. Too many people believe in “saving yourself”. What were words of ridicule thrown at Jesus has become a way of life for many people, “save yourself”. Jesus paid no heed to such nonsense, nor should we. We should heed the merciful message of Jesus: “Love another as I have loved you.”

There is much anxiety about the future of the country following the elections. The elections did not resolve many of the bitter conflicts seen during the past year of political campaigning. As the followers of Jesus we should not retreat the threatening gloom. We should resist the temptation to save ourselves. Jesus holds out his wounded hands to us from the cross and extends to us the wisdom and mercy of the Father. He did not save himself because he wanted to save us. The warnings or promises coming from the persistent partisan bickering do not give us much

hope. Even with his humiliated, suffering condition on the cross, Jesus has more to offer and a greater wisdom to share. Especially now, the gospel of life, the mission of mercy has a message that can heal and save a broken world.

This commands that we first unite ourselves with the crucified Christ, that we place ourselves under His dominion of mercy. Like the repentant thief we must come closer to the crucified Lord, asking him for his mercy. "Jesus, remember me." Trusting that he will save us, then frees us to save others. We can learn to forgive because we are forgiven by Christ. We can reconcile with others, because Jesus has reconciled us to the Father. We feed others, because we have been nourished from His cross. We can respectfully see one another, because Jesus has looked upon us with mercy. We can help the weak, because Christ is our strength. We can encourage others, because the Lord is our hope. We can stand with the unborn, the imprisoned, the immigrant, the homeless and the hopeless because Jesus stands with us. We can do all these things because Jesus says mercifully to us from the cross, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."