

**Christ the King**  
**November 20, 2016**

It's certainly no surprise to find that there is widespread distrust of authority these days, a distrust of our basic institutions and their leaders. As a response to this corporate mistrust people have turned toward individualism to such an extreme that for many the only acceptable authority is the individual self. The only authority that I will allow to tell me what is right and what is wrong is myself.

As a result, many people have become uncomfortable with the idea of Christ as ruler. The titles of "lord" and "king" for Jesus are unsettling for some folks because they believe that such titles are borrowed from oppressive and irrelevant systems of government.

But Jesus is hardly a threatening figure. He's quite the opposite! This reluctance to accept Christ as King causes many to miss the point that Christ's kingship is one of *humility, service, compassion, and most importantly, mercy*. He's not a king who imposes; He invites. He's not an imperial king; he's a shepherd king.

Jesus knew all about the oppressive nature of secular rulers. After all, He was put to death by one of them. He defined His role as king to be that of humble service and invited His followers to be servants as well.

In the New Testament we find that Christ's kingdom is connected to His suffering and death. Even though Christ is coming at the end of the ages to judge the nations His teachings present a kingdom of justice and judgment that are balanced with radical love, mercy, peace, and forgiveness.

So when we celebrate Christ as King, we are celebrating a king who willingly died for each of us as individuals and whose "loving-kindness endures forever." Christ is the king that gives us true freedom.

But we must also be aware that there are other tyrants lurking in our lives that also want to own and control us, and they can be called *spiritual tyrants*.

Fear is one of those tyrants that fill us with timidity along with a lack of initiative, procrastination and laziness.

Fear causes us to withdraw into defensive isolation. Think of the bad thief in today's Gospel.

Guilt is another of the tyrants that wants to control us. Often it's accompanied with a sense that everything is ruined and nothing is good. It leads us to play the blame game, finding fault in everyone else around us and belittling those who don't think like we do.

Hurt and resentment are other tyrants. They cause us to avoid others, to bury our care and concern for others, along with a sense of self-entitlement leading to various forms of self-gratification.

We can see all of this illustrated in our Gospel reading as we witness the interplay between the two criminals crucified alongside Jesus. The abusive thief is filled with inner tyrants.

He's angry. He lashes out at anyone within range...even at Jesus who after all is his fellow victim and can hardly be responsible for his situation.

This is contrasted with the attitude of the Good Thief who accepts his fate and his own responsibility for what he has done. His words to the Bad Thief are interesting, "for you are subject to the same condemnation."

The word "condemnation" in Hebrew means both judgment and sentence so we can see this at two levels; all three are under the same sentence of death but all three in the moment of their death also face the judgment of God.

This makes sense of the Good Thief's earlier words, "Have you no fear of God at all?" The Good Thief is reminding his fellow criminal that they are approaching the moment of truth, the moment of divine judgment, and that this is not the time to be angry and blame other people but it is the moment to look inwards, to admit guilt and seek repentance from God.

He then calls on Jesus to "remember" him when he comes into his Kingdom. The Biblical use of this word "remember" is much deeper than just calling to mind. In a real sense it means "to make present".

If Jesus remembers him then by this action the Good Thief will be brought into the Kingdom of Heaven.

On this feast of Christ the King, we come to the culmination of the Liturgical Year. We've experienced at Mass all the principal events of Christ's life. We have accompanied Jesus right through from his conception to his ascension into heaven. We have gone over the main content of his teaching and examined the miracles and those moments when he let his glory be seen.

Having walked with him throughout this Year of Mercy we're reminded of the most important thing of all: that each one of us will face death and judgment and that each one of us must do what we can while there is still time to prepare ourselves for that awesome day.

And this means, in a word, that we must repent. We must acknowledge our own sinfulness and hopelessness and turn to God in all humility asking him to save us and heal us. This is what the Year of Mercy has been all about!

So as we begin the season of Advent next week, we need to ask ourselves: Who or what are our captors holding us in bondage? Are they the words and actions of other human beings or demons that oppress our hearts and souls? What are our addictions?

What has a hold on our hearts and souls that keep us from exercising mercy? Resentments? Guilt? Envy? Jealousy? Shame? The treatment we receive from others?

When we become aware of the things that hold us in their grip, that is the moment when we need to turn to Christ our King because He is a king of compassion, forgiveness, and freedom. Christ isn't a King bent on enslaving us, rather He's a King whose sole desire is focused on liberating us, freeing us to be all that God our Father created us to be.