

When we celebrate Christ, the King of the Universe, it might seem strange we hear about Jesus's crucifixion. But what appears to be the most humiliating moment of Jesus's life, is paradoxically the high point – when his kingship over all of creation is revealed.

This is when Jesus saves all of humanity, when he sacrifices his human life in exchange for our eternal life, when he redeems every person who will ever live from all their sins and reconciles us to our Father.

When I hear the crucifixion in the Gospel, I think back to when I still lived in Hollywood in 2004, and the release of Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*. All the physical violence Jesus suffered is on the big screen, and it makes you appreciate and love Jesus even more for what he went through to save us.

But what really struck me even more was something I had never thought about before: the psychological violence Jesus suffered. It's unceasing. The whole way of the cross, even at the end as he looks out from the cross, everyone is screaming at him, mocking him, cursing him, shouting out insults, making obscene gestures. Even a criminal hanging next to him is mocking him.

But not the other one, in today's Gospel. He gets it. He recognized, as we need to remember, that Jesus's kingdom is not of this world. The Good Thief, the future St. Dismas, understands that Jesus is indeed a king, whose reign extends to the other side of death. And he helps Jesus rally.

He expresses his faith in Jesus and asks Jesus to remember him in his kingdom. And Jesus lovingly and mercifully assures him, that today he would be with him in paradise. Jesus gives him immediate salvation. And we learn that salvation isn't being saved from suffering, but being saved for God's kingdom of eternal life.

Jesus's kingship is unlike other kings. He isn't interested in advancing his own interests or saving face or fulfilling other people's expectations. He hates revenge, and force of any kind. Popularity doesn't matter to him.

Instead, he's a king who does God's will, who is Divine Mercy and pardons our sins, who serves and dies for others. He loves his neighbor to the very end; he cares about us, is in solidarity with us; he pours out his life for others, to the last breath.

When we're baptized, we become subjects of Christ the King, to serve Jesus and his kingdom in a unique way, according to our particular gifts, personality and life circumstances. We represent Christ the King to the world. We are the only signs of His kingdom. We bring people his love, give them hope and purpose, and warm their hearts. It's our words, deeds and example that can heal people from their selfishness, greed and unfairness.

We can't dwell on past disappointments, or fear the future. We have to focus on living in the present, because the time to act is now, the time we can make a difference is now. We continue Jesus's mission of changing the world with God's values, building his kingdom here on earth just as it is in heaven.

We can't limit our faith to our private lives. If we don't defend and spread Christian values in society, what values will thrive there? If we don't continue to bring Christ into our culture, what will our culture become? If we don't spread God's kingdom by bringing our faith into society, others will bring in their values and beliefs, and many are bad. We have to imitate Christ, even when it brings rejection and sorrow like he experienced.

Today we celebrate Christ's victory over everything, including death, and we anticipate the triumph of his kingdom and his values at the end of time. May Christ the King rule our minds, our hearts, our wills, and our bodies.

Christ the King Feast Day, November 24, 2019, Fr. John Ozella