

24 November 2013

Today's gospel has a Holy Week and Easter feel about it. Jesus is nailed to the cross between two criminals. We know the story well. One expects Jesus to use his power to save them all from death. The other, conscious of his fault, but full of faith in the Lord simply responds, 'Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom'. And that kingdom can only be achieved by the death of Jesus on the cross. But this death is transformative; from the death of Jesus comes the promise of life, the hope of the resurrection, the gift of faith through the saving waters of Baptism.

We are sharers in the kingdom through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In today's first reading, David is anointed king of Israel. Anointing means to be chosen, called and set apart by God. Anointing is such a rich symbol in our Catholic sacramental tradition. We are anointed in Baptism and Confirmation, two of the three great sacraments of initiation that gives us the gift of faith and makes us members of God's family the Church. A priest's hands are anointed at his ordination. A bishop's head is anointed at his ordination. New altars and new churches are consecrated with oil. For those who receive the sacrament of the sick, oil is used to anoint and heal.

On this feast of Christ the King, today's second reading reminds us that Jesus is King not because he lives in palace detached from earthly reality. Jesus is king because he did the complete opposite, he emptied himself by dying on the cross, his death brought justice, peace and healing, his death brought new life and conquered death forever. And for us who are called and anointed, who are his disciples by word and deed, Jesus calls us to follow his own example of love. Jesus invites us to serve and to lay down our lives for the sake of the Gospel.

The preface of today's Mass, perhaps the most beautiful of them all, draws us into the mystery of God's kingdom. It is a kingdom that has nothing to do with elaborate palaces and the royal family. The vision of the kingdom of God is opened up before us. It is an eternal and universal kingdom, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace. All these phrases are key words in our life of discipleship as followers of Jesus. We are people

of holiness and grace, we are people of justice, love and peace because in Baptism and Confirmation we are called and anointed. We are called to give our lives as Jesus gave his. We are called to be witnesses of God's healing power in our world. Again today, we remember and pray for the people of the Philippines. We pray that the people of that nation may know God's hope and healing at this difficult time. Especially when the international media crews start to pack up and move on to the next big story, we are called to remember the people of the Philippines. We are in solidarity with them by our prayer and financial support.

Here at the table of the Eucharist, the call of God's kingdom means that the poor and suffering are not forgotten. Here at the table of the Eucharist, even total strangers are brothers and sisters in Christ. Here at the table of the Eucharist even the homeless find a home as children of God. 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'. That statement seems to be about the future but in reality it speaks of the present. Here in this place, each and every day of our lives, the kingdom of God is at work in us. And what precisely is it? It is an eternal and universal kingdom, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace