34th Sunday in O.T. – Feast of Christ the King 2022

A beggar, sitting at the side of the road begging from those who passed by, noticed the King himself coming, complete with his whole entourage. He thought, “This is my lucky day!” So, in expectation he stretched out his hands to the King, but instead of giving something, the King asked, “What will you give me?” The beggar, while surprised and disappointed, nevertheless, fished out a grain of rice, the tiniest thing he had, and gave it to the King, who smiled, and went on his way. At the end of the day, the beggar was checking his day’s takings. To his amazement, he discovered a small grain of gold – the size of a rice grain. At that moment he realized what had happened, and wept bitterly remembering his own reluctance to give, and thought to himself, “If only I had given all!”

Next Sunday is the 1st Sunday of Advent, which is one way of saying that Christmas is just around the corner. At Christmas we sing that beautiful carol, "In the bleak mid-winter"; it asks, “What can I give him, poor as I am?/ If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb;/ if I were a wise man I would do my part,/ yet what I can I give him,/ give my heart."

Today we celebrate the Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. The Gospel passage chosen for today’s Mass tells of Jesus, hailed indeed as a king, but with scornful contempt - the leaders jeered him, the soldiers mocked him, and a thief abused him; for his crown, a garland of thorns; for his throne, the cruel timbers of the Cross. Many see in the Cross nothing other than the triumph of brute force, - might is right! But for us, the Cross reveals the true meaning of Christ's kingship; the world thinks of power in terms of domination, but Christ’s kingship is of a different kind. St Paul describes it in these words: *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22).* Jesus draws us to himself by love. – as we gaze upon the Cross, “heart speaks unto heart”, and with the repentant thief, we can pray, *“Jesus, remember me”.* The Christmas carol says, “What I can I give him, give my heart”. A much-loved little traditional prayer of devotion prays, “Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine”

The first reading from the Book of Samuel, speaks of King David *“shepherd of my people”;* the image of the shepherd depicts the relationship between the king and his people. It is one of intimate contact and trust between shepherd and sheep. Jesus chose it to explain his kingship – he is the Good Shepherd. He gives his life for his sheep, and they with their hearts, hear his voice and, in love and trust, follow him.

Pilate asked Jesus, *“So you are you a king then?”* and Jesus replied, *“Yes, I am a king”.* But his image of kingship was that of the *“Good Shepherd”*, *“the one who lays down his life for his sheep.”* This is what the man we call “the good thief” so wonderfully discovered when he said to Jesus; *“Remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* This request drew from Jesus an answer that gives hope to all who put their trust in the Crucified King: *“Indeed, I promise you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”* With Jesus it is never too late, he turns nobody away – there are no limits to his love. That was the personal experience of the repentant thief, and of all who turn to Jesus. Perhaps this is something we must keep in mind as we strive to prepare for a holy Christmas. We can give him our sins! We can be transformed by his love!

The crucifix, symbol of the insulted Christ, is our most sacred icon! We who gaze, with faith and trust, on the crucified Christ, see something astounding: we see the greatest power on earth; we see love; we see forgiveness; we see mercy!*.* In a world, where there are more Christian martyrs than at any other time in human history, the Cross really does boldly proclaim, “We are not afraid”, *“If I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear, you are there....”* *(Psalm 22).*

The king asked the beggar, “What will you give me?” Jesus says, “I have given myself for you, to the last drop of my blood.” “What will you give me?”

*“God our Father,*

*You gave us your Son,*

*the beloved one who was rejected,*

*the Saviour who appeared defeated.*

*Yet the mystery of his kingship lights up our lives.*

*Show us in his death*

*the victory that crowns the ages,*

*and in his broken body*

*the love that unites heaven and earth.*

*This we ask through Christ our Lord.”* **Amen.**