

## Homily for Sunday, November 23, 2025 (Christ the King)



This solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe was first celebrated 100 years ago. In 1925 the world was rebuilding after the end of World War I, Italy was run by a fascist dictator, and the Church

had lost much of its political power. In the background of such chaos and upheaval, Pope Pius X, chose to establish the Feast of Christ the King. He didn't simply want to write an encyclical that most people wouldn't read. He wanted a feast where people could draw closer to Christ, the true king, the servant King, the King who was not like any king the world had ever seen or will ever see. Perhaps we need such a feast more than ever as we, too, live in a world abounding in false kings who want our allegiance.

Jesus broke onto the scene 1900 years before the feast was established. He was, and still is, the image of the invisible God, as St. Paul says. When we see him, we see God. He tells us, in action and in word, what God is like. So what can we say about this Jesus who lives in poverty, reaches out to the outcasts, and dies with criminals?

One thing we can say about Jesus is what Paul says about Jesus, namely, that, ***“Christ is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”***

That’s the kind of king I need, the one who holds all things together, especially when I can’t hold it together myself. Nothing is ever lost and no one is ever considered a lost cause for Jesus. He goes after the lost sheep and won’t rest until everyone and everything is brought back home. He even summarizes his mission that way by saying, ***“the Son of man has come to seek out and save what was lost.”*** He’ll always put you and your well-being first over and against his own wants.

He’s taunted by one of the criminals crucified next to him with, ***“Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”*** Save yourself means look out for Number 1, save your own skin, look after your own needs first, after all, that’s what someone who claims to be Christ ought to do. Jesus is the Christ, but in his kingdom, you come first. Today’s gospel passage ends with, ***“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”*** He doesn’t say, “I’ll get into Paradise first, then I’ll put in a good word about you to my Father. But since you’re a criminal, I wouldn’t get my hopes up too high.” Instead he says, “Today, you will be with me in Paradise.” That’s one thing we know about this servant king is that he puts his subjects, you and me, first. He’ll even lay down his life for love of us. What other king does that?

A second thing we know about Jesus, the king of the universe, is that he never attaches the offender to the offense. He doesn’t hold anyone to their past sins or their past reputations. He doesn’t deny the wrong the criminals have done or the

sinfulness of their actions. He's not pretending that nothing happened, nor is he turning a blind eye to the truth of our depravity. All throughout the gospels, he holds no offender to their offense. He refuses to define a person by their actions. Why would he start doing so just because he's dying on the cross? Instead he turns to the "good thief" and offers him a future, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise." Today is the only thing Jesus is concerned about, for today is the day of salvation, even if you've messed up everything up to this point. The offer is for today...now...and is not contingent on yesterday's report card.

The first thing we know about this king, Jesus, is that he will always put you first. Secondly, he will never reduce the offender to the offense, but always sees today as a new beginning, the day of salvation.

A third thing we know about Jesus, our King, is that he desires intimacy with each and every person. It's sad to see people my age or older who have never known the closeness and affection of God. When the "good thief" calls out to Jesus, he doesn't call him by any of the titles we find in the Bible for Jesus, and there are lots of them. Instead, he simply says, "**Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.**" By calling Jesus by his given name and not by a title, this is a sign of intimacy or, at least, a desire for intimacy. The good thief doesn't call out to the second person of the Blessed Trinity. He calls to Jesus, the one who is in the same predicament he is in. Jesus promises salvation to one like himself, marginal and rejected. So, Jesus came to save us, not himself. He doesn't hold us to our offense. And he desires intimacy with us.

A fourth thing we can say about him is that he wants to give away Paradise just for the asking. If you desire it, it's yours. The good thief's request that Jesus remember him when he comes into his kingdom was music to Jesus' ears. This criminal knows something that not everyone else knows, that is, that salvation cannot be earned or bought by our doing good works. It is the result of a love-trust relationship—love on Jesus' part, and trust on our part in a loving Saviour. This guy gets it. All Jesus wants to do is give the Kingdom of God away to anyone who is simply wanting it. He tells us numerous parables of a banquet that no one seems to be interested in. The invitations are sent out, more than once. The servants are sent out to the highways and byways to invite any and all in. There's no cost. Your ticket to get in is simply your desire to be there. Just ask and it shall be given unto you. The good thief makes Jesus' day by asking, and Jesus throws the doors of Paradise open to him.

"Ask and you shall receive" reminds me of a commercial for WestJet that first aired on December 9, 2013, that went viral. You might remember it. It was just before Christmas, and people were gathered at a certain gate at the airport awaiting their flight. To kill time, some of the passengers approached an interactive screen where Santa Claus actually addressed them by their name and asked them what they wanted for Christmas. Thinking it was merely entertainment for their kids, not too many adults took Santa at his word. They didn't even think it was strange that Santa knew them all by name. So, to play along, children, teens, and adults told Santa what they wanted for Christmas like a snowboard, a camera, an android table, a big screen T.V., or simply socks and underwear. What they didn't realize was that WestJet employees were diligently

working behind the scenes buying, wrapping, and putting name tags on these presents. When the passengers arrived at their destination airport they gathered at the luggage carousel expecting their luggage. Instead, coming down the shoot were wrapped gifts with each of their names on it. People were shocked with surprise and joy. Even the big screen T.V. was waiting for this couple and their two children. It was hard to tell who was happier, the passengers who received these unexpected gifts or the workers at WestJet who made it all happen.

Ask and it shall be given to you. We ask for so little, like socks, while God wants to give you the big screen T.V. The good thief asked for the kingdom and he got it. “There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased my Father to give you the kingdom” (Lk. 12:32).

He puts you first. He doesn't hold you to your sins. He desires intimacy with you. And finally, he promises you Paradise just for the asking. That's the kind of king I both want and need.

*~Fr. Phil*