

Sermon: Last Sunday of the Church Year

Text: Luke 23:27-43 (v.38)

Theme: Jesus is King!

Goal: In death as well as in life, Jesus is the Messiah/King!

Dear Friends,

Introduction: What is the image you have of a King? When we look to the royal family of England, we see pomp, luxury, jewels... The kings in Biblical times were surrounded by luxury and power, especially Herod, who was the king at Jesus' time.

Someone hanging on a cross, bleeding on His forehead was surely not an image of a King, even He was crowned – with a crown of thorns.

The Last Sunday of the Church Year (next Sunday Advent begins) is dedicated to honour Christ, the King. Even if the Gospel shows Christ's deeper humility and the mockery of the people, Jesus is **KING**, as it was written on a plaque above the cross: "This is the King of the Jews." and we accept and adore Him as **our** King as well!

The Apostle Paul makes a firm statement in his letter to the Philippians (2: 8-11) about Jesus humiliation and His consequent glory as King: "And being found in appearance as a man, he (Jesus) humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, (is KING) to the glory of God the Father."

I – The Kingdom of Power

Jesus is King over the entire universe, one God with the Father and

the Holy Spirit. The Epistle (Colossians 1:16) for today says: “For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.” The resurrected Jesus said: “All authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Me” (Matthew 8:18). Psalm 103:19 says: “The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His Kingdom rules over all.”

Some people misunderstand this power of Jesus. **If** God is Almighty, how does He allow hurricanes and catastrophes which kill thousands of people? – **If** God is powerful, how doesn't He heal my cancer? - People don't understand that God uses His power where and when He wants, - not when human beings want.

If...If... “If He is the Christ of God, the Chosen One, let Him save Himself”, - the people and the rulers sneered at Him. – “If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself”, - mocked the soldiers. – “Aren't You the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” – said one of the criminals at His side, hurling insults at Him.

If...If... “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a bread”, said the devil to Him at the Temptation Mountain (Luke 4:3).

Jesus could have transformed a stone into bread. Jesus could have avoided catastrophes and sicknesses. Jesus could have come down from the cross. He was powerful to do these, because He was and He is King. But He didn't want it at that moment. Three days after His crucifixion He rose again from the death, a much bigger miracle than to come down from the cross.

We confess that Jesus is the powerful King of the Universe and we rely on His power, praising Him and serving and obeying Him.

II – The Kingdom of Grace

Jesus is King over another Kingdom as well: The Kingdom of Grace.

Jesus showed His grace and love on the cross even to His enemies.

When the soldiers were nailing Him on the cross, He prayed for them

“Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” – Jesus showed His grace and love to one of the criminals on a cross at His side. When he appealed to Jesus, saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom”, Jesus promised him: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

When asked by Pontius Pilate about His Kingdom, Jesus answered: “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” - “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. - Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” - “What is truth?” retorted Pilate. (John 18:36-36) – Pilate couldn’t understand that there is a spiritual Kingdom, much bigger and better than earthly power and richness.

The Kingdom of Grace is the reunion of all believers, The Holy Christian Church. Jesus rules over this Kingdom with His Word and the Sacraments, preserving us in His grace and calling more people to the true faith. It is called “Kingdom of Grace” because it is free to become citizen of this Kingdom. No one can enter it by his own efforts or merits, but only by God’s grace, believing in Jesus and acknowledging Him as King, as the criminal did, confessing his faith and his hope.

The Epistle for today says: “God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:13-14).

Therefore the church has such a big importance as the visible agency of God on earth, sharing through the Gospel and the Sacraments God’s grace of forgiveness and redemption.

As Christians, we believe and we acknowledge Christ as our King of Grace, giving Him all the glory as our Saviour!

### III – The Kingdom of Glory

As we know that everything has an end, - and the end of the year reminds us this again, - Jesus promises us a Kingdom that will never have an end: The Kingdom of Glory. Through His resurrection and ascension, Jesus went back to *heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from thence He will come to judge the living and the dead* (Apostles' Creed). He is the King of Glory, as we laud and magnify Him in several Christmas carols and as Psalm 24 exalts Him.

One of the criminals crucified at Jesus' side was the first one of the New Covenant to enter the Kingdom of Glory. He heard Jesus' promise, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise," in the Kingdom of Glory! Many others followed him, as we heard on All Saints Sunday. Our Christian hope lifts our eyes to the Kingdom of Glory where our faithful beloved ones are and where we believe we go as well when our life here ends.

Conclusion: Jesus, the King: The Almighty King, ruling over the entire universe; the Gracious King, ruling over His Holy Christian Church; the Eternal King, ruling over angels and all the departed saints forever and ever. - As long as we are citizens of His Kingdom of Power, let us work and live responsibly as good managers of God's creation, helping to preserve and to develop the blessings we receive as daily bread. – As long as we are members of the Holy Christian Church, His Kingdom of Grace, let us enjoy His grace and pardon offered in the Gospel and in the Sacraments of the Holy Baptism and of the Holy Communion, living a godly life according to God's will. – And when our time comes, let us be sure that Jesus' promise in our text about the Kingdom of Glory is for us as well: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." Amen.