

Feast of Christ the King - C

“Remember me, when you come into your kingdom.”

How **startling** do we find this request?

Let’s **linger for a moment** on the scene, separating it out from the tradition within which we celebrate it, and taking it in its original context:

Jesus is being crucified between two criminals. **They cannot have known one another well**—Jesus only spent the one night in prison.

The **two criminals** seem **hardly the type** who would have spent time trying to get close to Jesus while he preached and taught and healed.

We have **no indication** that they knew him any better than from **hearsay**.

That seems **apparent from the first criminal’s mockery**: “Save yourself, and us!” Here’s someone **looking**, even at the very end, **for a way out** of a tight spot; grasping at straws as he tries to save his life.

But the **second criminal**—**what could have been going through his mind** when he asks Jesus, toiling under the torture of a slow death on the crucifix, to remember him under any circumstances, let alone **to see in Jesus’ current predicament an avenue to kingly power?**

How does a person come to that sort of faith?

Under the circumstances it seems **too large a leap** to draw the conclusion that where he has ended up could lead to anywhere else but death and darkness.

And yet, he **makes his request**, admitted sinner though he is, and **Jesus responds** with a **gift of hope** and assurance: “**Today**, you will be with me in paradise.”

What strikes me is that **this seemingly lost soul** didn’t let anything get in the way of his trust that Jesus, even on the cross, was in a position to effectively respond to him.

Even on the cross, Jesus must have been so imbued with the presence of His Father that **a person could make the connection** between Jesus on the cross and Jesus in eternal glory.

We see **evidence** of that in the **passage immediately preceding** the one read today. There we find **Jesus’ prayer to the Father that he forgive** those who are putting Jesus to death, saying “They know not what they do.”

Today’s passage from **St Paul’s letter to the Colossians** did not stop at **praising Jesus for his self-giving love**, but **goes on to proclaim** that Jesus is actually the epitome of what God had intended all along.

Rather than being only a vehicle for God’s intervention to save a broken

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world, Paul borrows from an ancient Christian hymn which portrays Jesus as the point of it all from the very beginning:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation.”

“He is before all things and in him all things hold together.”

In the stark reality of the cross, when everything else is stripped away, Jesus' essential reality continues to shine through. He is Deus pro nobis – God for us.

And the criminal, who likewise has had all external supports taken from him, has eyes to see into the fundamental reality of our relationship with God:

That God never gives up, never wavers from his primordial intention—that we be with him in paradise.

As Americans, we are not too well practiced in what it means to live in a kingly realm, where the king's word is law.

We value our democracy and the ability to let our convictions speak for us in the public square. Sometimes that works, sometimes it doesn't.

Sometimes the common good is served, sometimes it is not.

Today, more than anything, we can take heart in the constancy of God and

in God's sovereign will and power to save us.

Regardless of the hot water we may have gotten ourselves into,

the times we have acted out of ignorance or self-centered short-sightedness;

the times when we have let our anger or fear losing the status quo dictate;

or even when revenge has been our goal;

we can look to the repentant criminal's profession of faith and his confidence that,

even when it appears that all is lost, it still pays to turn to Jesus, the king of all that is,

daring to ask that he remember us, and being confident that his reply will be affirmative, salvific, God for us.

All is not lost. God reigns in Jesus Christ the Lord.