

34<sup>th</sup> Sunday (C)

20<sup>th</sup> November 2016

'King... Cross ... Mercy ... Paradise'

2Sam 5: *they anointed David king of Israel.*

Col 1: *all things to be reconciled through Him and for Him*

Lk 23: 35–43: *Jesus, remember me, when you come into Your kingdom.*

Were you moved by that passage? I can't imagine *anyone* could fail to be moved by that scene: our Lord Jesus in the agony of His crucifixion, nearing the end of His earthly life. Repeatedly, those around Him goad and provoke Him: first the Jewish elders, then the soldiers echo it, and then one of the thieves joins in: "If you are the Christ, as You say, then save Yourself!" Jesus says nothing. He will not be tempted into abandoning the humanity that He has united Himself with, merely to get out of death, or display His divine power arbitrarily. He speaks only when one of those near Him doesn't adopt a superior or aggressive tone: the repentant thief acknowledges humbly his sinful life, and simply asks of our Lord that He remember him in the Kingdom. This is the one who is afforded a reply, and not just a reply, but a promise. The others had received nothing from Jesus despite all their prompting; the 'good thief' receives everything! He receives forgiveness, and he receives paradise.

It is this repentant thief, then, that sees the true kingship of Jesus. He isn't looking for majesty expressed in showy displays of power; he is looking only for an exercise of kingly mercy. He is the only one who gets it right. It's not that he misses Jesus's being a king — instead he recognises what sort of a king Jesus is. The others can't contemplate a king on a Cross; but the repentant thief sees that Jesus on the Cross is on His throne of mercy — it's precisely from the Cross, from His abandonment by so much of humanity, that He dispenses His mercy. Those who abandoned Him were many: even in this scene, the several elders, the several soldiers, the other thief hanging there; just *one* there is who turns to the king for mercy, that truly divine gift. In fact, Jesus in His mercy will lavish so much more than that, from the Cross: if you remember, He also gives us His Mother, from the Cross, as our Mother; He gives us the Sacraments (the "blood and water" flowing from His pierced side); He gives us the promise of paradise, eternal life with Him. To me, this Gospel scene is summed up in four words: "King" ... "Cross" ... "Mercy" ...

“Paradise.” Jesus is *King*; but He is King reigning from a *Cross*; from His throne of the Cross He dispenses regally His *Mercy*; and the fruit of that Mercy is, for us, the promise of entry into *Paradise*, His Kingdom on high. Surely we cannot fail to be moved when we see this scene with the eyes of faith, in all its glory!

We come, this Sunday, to the end of the Holy Year of Mercy — and it’s a fitting moment, then, to reflect again on the centrality of mercy to our faith in the Lord Jesus. As we celebrate Jesus as Lord and King of all things and of all people and times, we must of necessity see that His mercy is the key. From the Cross itself, which stands at the centre of human history, Jesus is lavishing mercy. Please God, each of us has grown this Jubilee Year in an appreciation of Jesus’s mercy, and our desperate need for it! None of us can live without the mercy of Jesus washing us clean regularly. Those who stood beneath the Cross and simply told Jesus what He should be doing received no reply. Jesus loved them, but they were not seeking His mercy. It was the one who did ask for mercy who received lavishly the

outpouring of Jesus’s gifts and promises. “Mercy” ... leads to “Paradise.” Let’s not forget that! The very reason we seek God’s forgiveness and mercy is that we desire to be at rest, and happiness, in heaven. So, please God, this Holy Year of Mercy has reminded us, again and again, of the need to confess our sins and be bathed in the cleansing blood of our Saviour. As we end this Church year — as we end the Year of Mercy and embark once again, next Sunday, on our Advent season — let’s make sure that the lessons learnt in this past year are carried forward. It may well be that we need to avail ourselves again of the loving gift of Jesus’s mercy in Confession, especially if it’s been some months since we last received the Sacrament. If so, make sure that in Advent, some time, you get to Confession. Confession is that same personal encounter that the repentant thief had with Jesus, who looked at him with love, saw his sorrow for sin, wiped out his sins at a single glance, and promised him Paradise. *Lord Jesus our King, may each one of us be moved to seek time and time again Your divine mercy, and so attain Your blessed Kingdom.*