Weekly Readings, Reflection and Prayers, 23rd November, Christ the King

EPISTLE: Colossians 1.11-20

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

GOSPEL: Luke 23.33-43

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One.' The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.' There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'

REFLECTION: Rev Tara

Today we stand with the Church around the world as we contemplate one of the great paradoxes of our faith: that our King—Jesus Christ—is crowned not on a throne of gold but on a cross of wood. Our readings from Luke and Colossians draw us to contemplate what it means to call Jesus "King" in a world that still measures power by force, status, and control.

In Luke's Gospel we are taken to the place called *The Skull* where in the most brutal of settings, Jesus is proclaimed King. The soldiers mock him, the leaders sneer. Even the inscription posted above him reads with cruel irony: "This is the King of the Jews." Everything in this scene seems to deny what the world understands by the term 'kingship'. There is no royal procession, no army defending him, no display of worldly might. And yet, for Christians, this is the moment when Jesus' kingship is revealed most clearly, secured not by shedding others' blood, but by offering his own. This kingship is not marked by using his power to escape suffering, but by offering out the love

that endures all suffering. He didn't demand obedience, but offered forgiveness, particularly to those who were doing such a bad wrong to him.

Then we hear the voice of the criminal beside Jesus, who, unnamed as he is, sees in Jesus what the world cannot see. His request is humble, seeking not mercy and forgiveness. And Jesus replies with those wonderful words of promise and love: "Today you will be with me in Paradise." Here is the King whose authority is exercised through compassion, grace, and welcome for all, vent h thief cast out by society.

In our other reading, from Colossians, Paul gives us a sweeping vision of Christ's majesty. This Jesus, crucified between criminals, is also "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." By him all things were created; in him all things hold together. He is the head of the Church, the beginning and the end, the one in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. This is no ordinary king, no temporary ruler—this is the One through whom God is reconciling all things, making peace "through the blood of his cross." In this passage Paul reminds us that Jesus is not King *despite* the cross, he is King *because* of the cross. His kingly power is revealed in sacrificial love, not in domination.

We live in a century marked by extraordinary achievements which have also lead to profound anxieties. Nations jostle for influence; leaders compete in displays of strength; social media amplifies the clamour for recognition and validation. In politics, in business, even in everyday life, authority is often measured in numbers—votes, followers, markets, clicks. Many voices urge us to look after ourselves first, to cling to security, to prioritise success. We see this on the global stage, where countries boast about military might or economic growth. We see it locally, as different groups try to exert their influence. We see it in the pressure placed on our young people, who are often told that success comes from self-promotion and relentless achievement. And yet Jesus says something very different. His kingship is not a competition but a calling, not demanding that we rise above others, but encouraging us to lift others up.

Think of the people who have shaped our society in Christ-like ways: not usually celebrities, but carers in understaffed hospitals; teachers who stay late to help struggling pupils; volunteers who drive people to appointments; farmers who steward the land faithfully and quietly; neighbours who check on the lonely. These are glimpses of Christ's kingdom; these are glimpses of his power expressed through service, and his authority exercised in love. So often in a crisis it is the ordinary local people who make the difference delivering food, clearing debris, opening their homes. That kind of humble, sacrificial action is far closer to the kingship of Jesus than any political statement of power and authority. As Christians we are called to live under the authority of the King who forgives all his enemies, welcomes every person who is cast out, and restores all those who feel broken. His kingdom through the compassioning of those around us. We play our part in growing this special kingdom when we choose generosity over grasping, and stand up for right as we work for peace and reconciliation among people holding different viewpoints.

Today as we mark the last Sunday of the Christian year and celebrate the Festival of Christ the King, we are called to serve a King whose crown is made of thorns, who calls us to follow his path and serve the vulnerable, the overlooked, and those who may be difficult to love. Following this King means allowing the peace of Christ—described in Colossians as holding all things together—to hold us together as a worshipping community, and trusting his strength, when the world's ideas of power leave us feeling small or insignificant. On the cross, Jesus redefined kingship forever. In his resurrection, he proved that love is stronger than death. It is this king who empowers us to live as citizens of his kingdom today, as we work together for justice, mercy, love and peace.

May we, like the thief on the cross, turn to Jesus with honesty and in hope once again today. May we hear the promise of fullness of life that he offers each one of us. And may we reflect his alternative yet beautiful kingship in all we say and in all we do, to the praise of God our heavenly father. Amen.

INTERCESSIONS: Rev Sue

Christ, to you our King, we pray that your church denominations may be seen to unite together to spread your word and your love to all. To teach all the true meaning of the Advent and Christmas seasons. May your kingdom be known……Here on earth.

We pray for those who seek to bring peace to your troubled world. A peace that will benefit the peace makers without glorifying their name. When that peace comes may we all show a willingness help to rebuild the lands ravaged from warfare.

May your kingdom be known Here on earth.

We pray for all leaders of nations that they will be open to your bidding, governing with integrity and love. We give thanks for those motivated to help the poor, ending poverty, and to assisting those imprisoned unfairly. Wee look for a time when the kingdoms of this world will be the kingdom of God.

May your kingdom be known Here on earth.

King of glory come and rule in our homes that they be places of love and warmth. Rule our relationships and our hearts. Change us where that change is required that we put the lives of others before our own. May your kingdom be known Here on earth

We ask for your blessing on all divided people and relationships. We pray for those who struggle to manage on their own. Give comfort and strength to all who are ill, and all who are fearful . We pray for friends and loved ones who are in need at this time among them Simon Marshall, Geraldine Wilkins, Pat Evans, Megan Raw, Eve Vass, MJ Curtis, Tim Sturt, Jenny Gibson, David Evans, Dick Wallis, Andy Schell. May your kingdom be known…Here on earth.

Lord Jesus Christ, King of Glory you have triumphed over death and defeated darkness, we entrust to you those we know who have recently died Vincent Hardy, Gwenyth Hall, Christopher Young, Liz Broad, Leonard Owen.

Accept and welcome them and us into your everlasting kingdom, that we may live under your reign forever; for you are our king.

Amen.