

“King Jesus”

Today, we celebrate **Christ the King Sunday and the Remembrance of the Dead**. Because this is the last Sunday of the Church Liturgical Year – next Sunday starts the new Liturgical Year with the First Sunday of Advent, today is the day we remember those who have died during the past twelve months. This year those two celebrations are closely related. The first connection between Christ the King and the Remembrance of the Dead is demonstrated by today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading, when one of the two criminals **crucified and dying** with Jesus inferred Christ, **would soon enter his kingdom**. Today’s two celebrations also have a meaningful intersection because, during the last few days, our nation has been **remembering** the assassination of President John F. Kennedy around the time of the 50th Anniversary of that terrible event. Focus has also, naturally, been on President Kennedy’s legacy.

The celebration of Christ the King and of the Remembrance of the Dead intersect as we examine today’s Scripture, for we find Christ is revealed as King by the second criminal – when they both are crucified and about to die. **So, remembering Jesus’ death reminds us of an occasion, which pointed to his kingship**. King Jesus is quite different from most kings and persons of authority – instead of having others die to protect his life, he dies for the welfare of all people – **he gives up his life** to bring about forgiveness, reconciliation, and the creation of the New Faith Relationship with the Divine Parent.

Alyce M. McKenzie addresses this special insight, writing, “What kind of king is this that we honor on this Reign of Christ Sunday? Not one we’ve ever seen before on this earth, but one who was, and is, and is to come. ... The question that comes to my mind today is, ‘What kind of king is this?’”

McKenzie, seeking a poetic way of expressing the subject, says, “Since I’m no hymn writer, I’ll write a poem of sorts instead.”

McKenzie’s poem begins, **“What kind of King is this?”** “Who is crucified at a place called the Skull? With a criminal on his left and a criminal on his right? What kind of king is this? Who allows himself to be disrespected and abused without speaking a word in his own defense?

What kind of king is this who allows even criminals to mock him without putting them in their place?

What kind of king is this whose thoughts are on others rather than his own pain at the peak of his own undeserved suffering?

How can a crucified king bring us life? How can a forgiving king right the wrongs done to us and that we have done to others?

How can a peaceful king end the wars that rage within us and around us?

How can a compassionate king find the strength to lead us?” (Edgy Exegesis, “What Kind of King Is This?” Reflections on Luke 23:33-43 by Alyce M. McKenzie)

McKenzie’s poem refers to what is described by today’s Reading, so let’s examine some of those details. As we do that, let’s look for things related to Jesus’ kingship. When he was crucified, Luke explains, **“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.’”** Yes, the soldiers not only crucified Jesus but they also mocked him and, specifically, challenged him to save himself, if he was really the King of the Jews! Yet, he did not respond. In line with mocking Jesus and the possibility of his kingship, Luke reports, **“There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the King of the Jews.”**

Luke also describes the ridicule and mocking done toward Jesus by one of the two criminals crucified with him. Again, Jesus did not respond. Instead, Luke explains, **“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.’”**

Amazingly, **“Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’”** What an amazing testimony about Jesus! It was remarkable that one of those two criminals, who was experiencing crucifixion and anticipating his own death, so clearly testified to Jesus’ innocence and declared Jesus to be King!

How would you expect a king to respond to finding himself in such a situation? Surely, a king would use all of his power and resources to prevent being crucified in the first place! Additionally, if a king did end up in such a

position, why would he respond as Luke reports, ***“Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’”***?

Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt answers some of these questions, saying, “As it is Christ the King Sunday again, it is ours, of course, to note what this exchange offers us about Jesus as King. The sacrifice Jesus made comes to mind first and always. The forgiveness which is spoken for those who haven’t asked for it, who may not even know they need it, is also at the center of this image now. The willingness of Jesus to truly see the one hanging next to him – even through what must have been blinding pain – to see beyond his broken life and to promise to remember him?” **“Well, that is the image I cling to now, for it means the promise holds for you and me as well.”** Hunt concludes, asking, **“How about you?”** (“Remembered” by Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt)

The promise also holds for all who have died in our Lord or who will die in him before Jesus returns to usher in the Fulfilled Kingdom of God! **So, King Jesus and his reign – his Kingdom intersects with those, who have died in Jesus Christ, for through his own self-giving and suffering death – our King has transformed reality and brought us into the New Faith Relationship with God** – given us the gifts of God’s Self-Giving “Agape” Love, Forgiveness, Healing, and Welcome – made us New Creatures in Christ – made us joint heirs with the Son of God!

Now, let us look at how there is an intersection between our Christ the King celebration and our Remembrance of the Dead in conjunction with the 50th Anniversary of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy. As we remember President Kennedy, it is fitting for us to recall he died while serving as our nation’s highest elected leader. He called all of us to take on the mantle of service to our country – to seek the welfare of all Americans. Specifically, I call our attention to a portion of President Kennedy’s Inaugural Address. Most of us are familiar with the beginning of this quote but what comes following that well known statement is very relevant to the intersection between the Remembrance of the Dead and the celebration of Christ the King. President Kennedy said at the conclusion of his Inaugural Address, “And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.

My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”

The President concluded, **“Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.”**

King Jesus, both by his example – including his self-sacrificial death on the cross and his ministry and by his teachings, and commands has called you and me and all of us to follow the New Life in Christ – the life of self-giving love and service. That quote from the conclusion of President Kennedy’s Inaugural Address affirms the life of service and testifies **“that here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.”**

When President Kennedy said those words, he had no way of knowing that he would die during his service as President of the United States of America. However, the fact he died as President supports his commitment to the truth, which **“ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you.”**

As today we celebrate Christ the King Sunday and the Remembrance of the Dead, it is good to remember, celebrate, and follow the self-giving sacrifice and service of those, who have entered into the promise Jesus gave to the criminal, who testified to Jesus’ kingship! It is good to remember the service and sacrifice of President John F. Kennedy, at the 50th Anniversary of his Death. It is especially valuable for us to remember the suffering love, self-sacrifice, and purpose of King Jesus, which is powerfully shown in the scene of his crucifixion with that extraordinary and faith testifying criminal.

Rejoice and give thanks for King Jesus’ promise, ***“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”*** Let us follow our King Jesus’ example and his call upon our lives, as President Kennedy reminds us, **“that here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.”** Amen.