

**THE SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,
KING OF THE UNIVERSE (YEAR C)**

November 20, 2022

2 Samuel 5:1–3 • Colossians 1:12–20 • Luke 23:35–43

I.

A year-and-a-half ago,
I met the grandsons of the artist who made the stained-glass windows
in the ambulatory.

Their grandfather was an immigrant from Denmark.

The family's surname is Rambusch,
which is the name of the company, based in New York.

The grandsons still have the business,
although they had never been to Richmond before.

The main windows in the ambulatory
were installed on the occasion of the Cathedral's silver jubilee in 1931.

In the center is my favorite window in the whole Church:
Christ the King.

The colors are dazzling.

And the depiction of Jesus is interesting.

He is a king.

And he looks a bit older than perhaps he did during his public ministry.

His Sacred Heart is exposed.

And we can see the nail prints in his hands.

He's holding a scepter with the fleur-de-lys or "flower of the lily."

That's an image both of the Trinity and the Virgin Mary.

And, in what is typical of the Christ the King depictions, Jesus is wearing priestly vestments.

II.

The image is conveying a lot of information.

The main point is this:

Christ is King—the ruler of the universe—
because of what he does on the Cross.

There, he conquers sin and evil.

Christ is a priest who offers that sacrifice,
and he is the victim offered in that sacrifice.

That sacrifice reveals his heart—
his infinite love for humanity.

At the time of the crucifixion,
Jesus' royalty or kingship was hidden.

For example,
he's wearing a crown,
but it's a crown of thorns.

He's acknowledged as a king but with derision:

“Above him there was an inscription that read,
‘This is the King of the Jews.’”

By the way,
that's the significance of the abbreviation INRI that is often seen above crucifixes.

It stands for the Latin phrase,
Jesus Nazareus, Rex iudaeorum:
“Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

In today's Gospel,
only the good thief is able to grasp that Jesus really is a King,
even though this King is in dire straits, as he himself is.

As so often happens,
God overturns our expectations.

God's way of doing things is very different from our own.

God's way of saving us is surprising, paradoxical.

Christ conquers as king by surrendering to God's plan,
by handing himself over to the Father,
by handing himself over for us.

How is it that only the good thief manages to figure out that Christ is King?

I think because of several interrelated things.

First, the good thief is repentant;
he knows he's done wrong,
and he accepts responsibility for those misdeeds:

“We have been condemned justly,
for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes.”

Second, the good thief respects God,
and is searching for him:

“Have you no fear of God?”,
he asks the other thief.

The good thief also longs for goodness:
forgiveness and a better life.

And the good thief recognizes goodness in Jesus:
that he is innocent:

“This man has done nothing criminal.”

So, the good thief joins together his convictions
in a humble, sincere, and prayerful request:

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

This is a beautiful way for us to celebrate the feast of Christ the King:
to recognize our need for God,
and to ask to be close to Christ.

After all, Christ wishes to be very close to us.

In a sense,
we’re next to him on the Cross when we come to Mass,
because here his sacrifice is renewed and made present.

And we are drawn into that great revelation of divine love and mercy;
we clearly see the Heart of the Son of God.

The Eucharist is Christ himself:
“body and blood, soul and divinity.”

Christ himself crucified, risen, and reigning with God in heaven.

He is King of the universe and wishes to be king of our everyday lives.

To say “Amen” to the Eucharist is to hail Christ as King.

To echo the words of the repentant thief in a prayer
that gives meaning to every day of our lives:

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Long live the King.