

Today we celebrate the great Feast of Christ the King, also known as the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, “King of the Universe.” And today’s Feast formally marks the end of the Church’s liturgical year, so you can say that today is the Church’s liturgical “New Year’s eve”—so this means that after mass we can all go home and drink champagne.

When I was reflecting on today’s Gospel in light of Christ the King, I couldn’t help but think of the profound irony in the details of this powerful account from St. Luke. I mean right off the bat in the first line of today’s Gospel, we’re told “The rulers sneered at Jesus…” Such irony there given that Jesus, *as King of the Universe*, is the *Supreme Ruler over all!* The evil and corrupt rulers in today’s Gospel who are ridiculing Jesus are literally standing before the *Supreme* Ruler of the Universe, the One in Whom *all power and authority rests*.

In fact, the power and authority of these corrupt rulers *comes from* the One they are crucifying. These corrupt earthly rulers think that *their power and authority is everything*, and they wield it with such malice and arrogance. Yet little do these evil and corrupt rulers know, that in light of Jesus, the One they’re sneering at, their earthly power and

authority is *nothing* compared to His eternal and infinite power. In this account, we're reminded that those with power and authority who attack and reject God condemn themselves in such a self-destructive way, given that all power and authority comes from God and is meant for the service of His will—the service of truth, goodness, and beauty.

The cruelty towards Jesus continues when these rulers exclaim “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God.” Even the soldiers jeered at him.” Now just imagine the horror and evil of all of this. I mean being half-naked, nailed to a cross, and dying slowly and painfully, must've obviously been extremely hard to begin with—but to also be ridiculed and mocked *as you're slowly dying* this painful death must've been even worse! Our Lord Jesus is just being *tortured*, physically and mentally. This is like someone marching into the hospice room of a dying innocent person and ridiculing them *as they're dying*. This is pure evil what's happening here.

And I can't even imagine what this must've been like for our Blessed Mother Mary who was there to witness all of this: to see your own Son, your flesh and blood, being humiliated, mocked, and ridiculed

as He's being brutally tortured and slowly killed, and you're just a powerless witness. *Such horror, such pain.* Just as any good mother shares in her child's suffering, no doubt that our Blessed Mother Mary shared in her Son Jesus' horrific suffering. Yet in the end, all of this also speaks to the *enormity* of Jesus' love for us and what He and His mother Mary were willing to endure for our salvation. Our Lord Jesus and His Mother endured such repulsive horror, but in their endurance they demonstrated an even *greater, more powerful love.*

Luke's account continues, "As they approached to offer him wine they called out, "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." First, notice how this mockery includes a final temptation to Jesus, one that is very similar to the temptations lobbed at Jesus in the desert by the devil just before His public ministry began. If you remember, the devil hurled similar temptations to Jesus in the desert attacking His identity saying, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread... If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here..." They're attacking Jesus' identity as the Son of God—the Messiah.

And then we read that they placed an inscription above Him that read, “This is the King of the Jews.” Now in Roman crucifixions, it was customary to attach a sign indicating the crime that the criminal had committed. Yet again, there is profound irony in this sign. Even though the Romans made this sign accusing Jesus of a crime, little do they know that there is actually underlying truth in this sign because *yes, Jesus is a King!* He may not have been the earthly and military King of Israel that many of the Jews had expected, but He *is the King of the Jews and of all peoples—Christ is the King of the Universe!* So yes, in a very real way, the sign hanging above Christ, points to His Kingship.

In fact, while He is hanging on the cross, *Jesus is reigning as King!* His enemies are absolutely oblivious to this! Jesus’ throne is a wooden cross and His crown is a crown of thorns! And yes, while Jesus is hanging on the cross dying, *He is at the height of His power and glory, which will be fully manifested at the Resurrection!* Christ is reigning supreme on the Cross because He is fulfilling the Father’s will—He is accomplishing the mission of redemption for all mankind!

While He is *dying* on the cross at the hands of *sinners*, Jesus is conquering sin and death once and for all—*such irony!*

The Gospel continues, “Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us.” Again, like Jesus’ enemies in the crowd, this one criminal hurls a similar temptation at Jesus attacking His divine identity. And yet there are two profound ironies with this temptation: 1) first, when he says “*Save yourself and us,*” the criminal is tempting Jesus to *selfishness* and yet little does He know that *Jesus is engaged in the most selfless act in human history! The cross is the epitome of selflessness!*

Secondly, the other half of that request, “*save us!*” This criminal has no clue that at that precise moment Jesus *is in fact saving them!* Hanging on the cross, our Lord Jesus *is saving us*—He’s saving that criminal who’s mocking him as well as His enemies who are also ridiculing Him! He *is saving all of them, and all of us*, from sin and death—eternal death! At that moment, our Lord Jesus is dying for the ones who are killing Him—He’s dying for *their* eternal salvation. Such profound irony.

Lastly, this powerful account concludes with Jesus' interaction with the other criminal. We're told this other criminal says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Notice how Jesus, out of His infinite love and goodness, *goes above and beyond the request of the repentant criminal*, who asked *only* that Jesus would remember Him when He comes into Kingdom. Yet Jesus promises Him *eternal salvation* and that He would be with Him forever in Paradise. Now when I hear the word "Paradise" I tend to think of clear, bright blue turquoise waters with beautiful white sandy beaches and palm trees. Yet here in this passage, St. Luke is emphasizing that paradise is *"being with Jesus."* *Wherever Jesus is, there is Paradise.* Jesus *is* Paradise! He is the Kingdom of Heaven incarnate!

Brothers and sisters, this is why the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is called "Heaven on earth." The Mass is a celebration of Christ's eternal victory over suffering, sin, and death—it's a celebration of Christ's victory over *our* suffering, *our* sins, and *our* death. The Mass reminds us that the Passion and death of Jesus is not some abstract, impersonal

event that has no connection to us—on the contrary, it is the most personal event in the history of the world that affects every human life! At *every* mass, the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ the King becomes sacramentally and truly present to us in a profound way!

***There's absolutely nothing like it on the face of the planet!***

*Every mass* is a celebration of Christ's Kingship! Brothers and sisters, our Catholic faith, which finds its greatest expression in the Mass, reminds us that *in* Christ the King, ***good will always triumph over evil!*** *In Christ the King*, the forces of darkness and evil have been defeated! *In Christ the King*, the forces of sin and despair have been conquered! *Christ the King* is our Light in the midst of darkness! Christ the King is our eternal hope in the midst of despair! Our eternal King reassures us in the Gospel of John declaring, "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world."

If we follow Christ the King with love and fidelity and humbly ***remain in Him, persevering until the end through all suffering and darkness with the help of His grace***, we ***will*** share in His victory and eternal glory! Paradise begins now! Long live Christ the King!