

Christ the King (C)  
(Colossians 1:12-20 / Luke 23:35-43)  
20.11.2016  
*Merciful King*

Today is the last day of the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Does that mean that from tomorrow on we can stop being merciful? Is mercy a kind of homeopathic pill that we take for only one year every fifty years?

Today is also the last Sunday of the liturgical year when we commemorate Christ as the King of the Universe.

What is the link between Christ's kingship and mercy?

In British tradition, the royal prerogative of mercy is one of the historic royal prerogatives of the British monarch, by which he or she can grant pardons to convicted persons. Like the presidential grace in the French system, it is a prerogative which is rarely granted and regulated by parliamentary laws.

As usual Jesus challenges this system. As King, he gives mercy to all, he offers it generously to each one of us. Mercy underlies everything and it is always available – today, tomorrow and until the end of time.

This generosity, this unbounded prodigality is the hallmark of our God in his dealings with us. God holds nothing back, nothing whatsoever. It is God's way to be merciful.

God's giving is so total, that he does not only give us things and goods but he gives himself to us in the most dramatic and radical way: in Jesus Christ he gives his life for us, to us so that we might live.

As we sing in one of our hymns: "Like a sea without a shore, love divine is boundless".

In our countries, many Christians feel under pressure and threatened in many ways. The temptation for us is to build walls and to harden the boundaries whether they are ecclesial or theological.

However we have to remember that to fence in God's mercy, to make it conditional or carefully weighed and measured is not in accord with the Gospel. In fact it is to project onto God our worst way of dealing with one another.

In our reading from the letter to the Colossians, St Paul mentions two things which are given to us: light and freedom.

Christ is the light which came into the world (cf. Jn 3:19) and, in his generosity, he made us "the light of the world" (Mt 5:14). In our turn what do we do with the light entrusted to us?

It is clear that we are neither supposed to hide it nor are we expected to blind others with it, directing the light into their eyes and expecting them to welcome it with enthusiasm.

The balance is delicate: on one hand, we are sent to bring the light of the Gospel to a world which longs for it and on the other hand we cannot impose it upon others.

It is in this context that mercy is particularly relevant and necessary. Mercy does not restrain our enthusiasm or our zeal, but it teaches us how to be lights in the world in a way which is respectful of others, gentle and patient with them.

With the gift of light comes the gift of freedom, a freedom born out of God's forgiveness of our sins.

It is clear that to forgive is to free ourselves from the wounds inflicted on us and it is also to free all those who have hurt or offended us from what they have done to us. True forgiveness begins with the acknowledgement that something wrong has been done and ends with the letting go of the wrongdoing so that the victim and the offender may continue their journey in life. This is what Jesus our King does on the Cross.

Are we men and women who keep others and ourselves prisoners of hurts and pain inflicted on one another?

What about our generosity to forgive ourselves for not being perfect, for not being the one we would like to be?

What about our generosity to forgive others for being flawed and hurtful? What about our generosity to forgive God for what we do not understand of his ways in our lives and in the world?

The Jubilee Year of Mercy was an opportunity for us Catholics, and indeed for all Christians, to grow in God's likeness, to be like our heavenly Father: to never tire to forgive and to bring light into every human situations of distress, pain and suffering.

The way forward for you and for me is not to turn our backs on the Year of Mercy as something of the past but to courageously embrace Mercy as a way of life for always. If we want to be faithful to our Christian identity, to our royal vocation, mercy is the only way for us to relate to one another.

Mercy is not to be displayed only sparingly a few days a month here and there but always. It is meant to bring light and open doors to all and at all times.

Let us not be fooled by those who claim that we are weak and naïve. If we truly live out of God's mercy then, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes, "there is no tyrant who can resist us, no oppression that cannot be ended, no hunger that cannot be fed, no wound that cannot be healed, no hatred that cannot be turned to love, no dream that cannot be fulfilled".