Christ the King (C)
Colossians 1:12-20 / Luke 23:35-43
23.11.2025
King of peace

On this day when we celebrate Christ as King of the Universe, it may seem a bit puzzling to read the Gospel of Jesus' crucifixion. We have to acknowledge that we do not immediately associate kingship with the image of a man wounded, humiliated, betrayed by his friends and dying on a cross. We feel probably more comfortable with the paintings we get on internet or the statues and stained glasses we see in our churches… in which Christ is depicted most often as impeccable, often dressed in an immaculate white robe, eyes wide opened looking at us in a display of power and self-confidence.

In our first reading from the letter of St Paul to the Colossians, there is a word which may help us to understand where the problem lies: "God wanted all *perfection* to be found in him."

What Paul meant was that in Jesus we have the fullness of God. Yet for us most of the time when we hear the word *perfection*, what we have in mind is a glorified image of who we are. Thus a perfect king should embody the culture and values that are essential to our personal or communal identities: and so it is that Christ the King is white, well-educated, law-abiding, clearly he is a Catholic and obviously, for me, he is French!

We are all tempted to reduce Christ the King to the decorum, pomp and regalia of a human king. It is a challenge for us is to return to the Cross and what it reveals to us regarding Christ as King of the Universe.

First we must distance ourselves from the notions of power and authority if they are not built on love; we must distance ourselves from the notions of grandeur and superiority if they are not understood in the context of humility and service. The Cross reminds us that the kingship of Christ is about passionate love and humble service. Christ is King by loving us to the end, out of self-giving love, lowering himself in love for us so that he may raise us up.

Our King is not seated on a high golden throne, keeping us at a distance for fear of contamination, looking at us from above as his servants who need to kneel, bow and crawl before being able to approach him. Christ the King came close to us, he comes close to each one of us, where we are and as we are, in order to show us how much his Father loves us. He comes to walk with us the way that leads us back home. As St Paul states in our first reading: "He has created a place for us in the kingdom." In his Kingdom we become members of the royal family, brothers and sisters of Christ the King, "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." (Rm 8:17)

In the celebration of Christ the King, we are reminded of our God-given dignity and of our responsibility to imitate Christ as his loving and humble servants, ready to give our lives for the common good and for peace in the world.

In 2025 there are many Christians who feel very insecure and who are prompt to use military words and images in order to describe their relationship with society, especially with those who are not part of their tribe. This form of Christianity is tempted to become very defensive and to build walls to protect itself and its vision of the world and the Church. Insecurity may lead us to consider all those who disagree with us as threats and to think in terms of "us versus them", "us against them".

The king we celebrate today is the King of Peace. He is the King who rebuked Peter's temptation to use violence at the time of his arrest: "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." (Mt 26:52) He is the King who identifies himself with all victims of violence.

In our turn as we want to follow our King, we are called to reject all forms of destructive violence, all violent words and deeds. A few weeks ago Pope Leo reminded us that all begins "with an education for peace that is disarmed and disarming. It is not enough, in fact, to silence weapons: we must disarm hearts, renouncing all violence." (*Address*, 30.10.2025)

A disarmed heart is a heart which knows that the Kingdom of God is not of this world (cf. Jn 18:36) and so it is a heart which does not rely on anger, aggression, rejection, manipulation and condemnation in order to display its strength. It is a heart which uses the weapons of the Spirit, which are "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Gal 5:22-23) These are the tools we must use in order to honour Christ our King and so participate in the building of the "kingdom that will never be destroyed." (Dn 2:44)

The Kingdom begins here and now, our allegiance to Christ the King is revealed in the way we relate to all others, in the decisions we make and the words we utter.

The words of the martyred archbishop St Oscar Romero are addressed to us today: "It is we humans who create the obstacles to the kingdom of God in the world. Christ does not want violence. Christ does not want and environment of mutual distrust, accusations, and calumnies. These are the obstacles to the kingdom of Christ."

In our families and communities, between our Churches and countries, "let there be dialogue, let there be understanding, let there be fraternity." (*Hom.* 20.11.1977, Vol. 1, p. 434, 436)