

November 23, 2025

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Luke 23: 35-43

[The people stood by and watched;] the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at Jesus and said, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God." Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews."

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Background:

This may seem like a strange text for the feast of "Christ the King." The people, the rulers, the soldiers, and even one of the criminals hanging on a cross all mock Jesus. From their point of view, Jesus appears to be just another pathetic Jew caught up in the Roman system of justice. He hangs on a cross with his crime posted so that those passing can ridicule him. He is a reminder to everyone of what happens to those who challenge the authority that the Roman governors and soldiers are there to enforce. But as often is the case in scripture, statements made in ridicule reveal Jesus' reality: not "a king," but the King of Kings.

Jesus does not respond to any who taunt him, but only to the criminal, who first testifies to Jesus' innocence and then requests that Jesus remember him when he comes into his kingdom. Jesus promises to honor his request. In this gesture of compassion, Jesus reveals the authority that is his. The rest of the bystanders remain blind to the reality of who Jesus really is.

This Gospel text also reveals how Luke has developed his Gospel for those who might like to reflect more deeply and appreciate Luke's understanding of Jesus as King. It will be helpful to become familiar again with the description Luke gives of Jesus' temptation in the desert (Luke 4:1-13):

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me." Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.'" Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' and: 'With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'" When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

As Luke describes the temptation of Jesus, he portrays Jesus as being faithful to God where Adam had failed. By eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, Adam lost his status as the son of God (Genesis 3:1-7), but Jesus refused to turn stones into bread for food even though he had not eaten for forty days. In the creation story, Adam had been given dominion over all (Genesis 1:26-30), but he still longed to be like God (Genesis 2:17; 3:19). In the second temptation, the devil offers Jesus power over the whole world, but he chooses to be subject to God's will for him. In the garden, Adam is told that if he eats of the fruit he will not die. In the desert, the

Devil says that if he throws himself off the temple, he will not die, but be rescued by angels. Most important here is the last line of the text: “When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.” Luke’s description of Jesus’ being ridiculed during his final hours is mirrored by his temptations in the desert. The temptations are based on Jesus being faithful in his relationship to the Father: “If you are the Christ of God, the chosen one...” Both here and in the desert, Jesus is tempted to escape the drudgery of being human and of death. Those taunting him believe that because he is the “Son of God,” he should not have to die. But Jesus remains the faithful Son of God and is obedient to the Father, even to death on a cross. His obedience is life-giving, and it affects God’s relationship to the whole world, just as Adam’s disobedience affected God’s relationship to creation.

In celebrating Jesus as King, the church uses a familiar image in a way that expresses spiritual reality. This reality is more significant for Christians than the importance of earthly kingdoms that are based in power over another. Jesus exhibits a surrender of power so that the power of God can be revealed. The reality of God’s kingdom is revealed in the person of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel and in Luke’s Acts of the Apostles. It is also made real for us in the lives of the holy men and women who have faced the powerful with the spirit of Jesus’ surrender here, and changed the world forever.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are your images of Kings? How might they be images of God?
2. Why do you think the Church has chosen this Gospel text for the church’s reflection on this feast of Christ the King?
3. In our text, Jesus is given the titles “Messiah,” and “King of the Jews.” The criminal referred to Jesus as “this man.” What are some the ways you refer to Jesus in your own personal prayer? What do those “titles” say to you about your relationship with Jesus?
4. Jesus did not respond to most of the people in the text. Do you ever feel like you are praying or even calling out to God, but there seems to be no response? Does this text give you any insights?
5. Can you take some time to talk with God about your personal understanding of Jesus as a king, the Church’s use of the title “King,” or insights and feelings that arose within you while reflecting on this Gospel?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fsc-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from readings for November 23, 2025, Solemnity: Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Elders of the tribes of Israel came to David in Hebron and said: “Here we are, your bone and your flesh. In days past, when Saul was our king, it was you who led the Israelites out and brought them back. And the Lord said to you, ‘You shall shepherd my people Israel and shall be commander of Israel.’” King David made an agreement with them there before the Lord, and they anointed him king of Israel.

*Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.
I rejoiced because they said to me, "We will go up to the house of the Lord."
And now we have set foot within your gates, O Jerusalem.
Jerusalem, built as a city with compact unity.
To it the tribes of the Lord go up, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.
In it are set up judgment seats for the house of David.*

Brothers and sisters: Give thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light. He delivered us from the power of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. His son Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. In him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent. In him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross, whether those on earth or those in heaven.

The rulers sneered at Jesus and said, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God." Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews." Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Excerpts from 2 Samuel 5:1-3; Psalm 122:1-5; Colossians 1:12-20; and Luke 23:35-43

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for November 23rd, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The Gospel for this Feast of Christ the King is from Luke, chapter 23, where Jesus hangs crucified under the inscription, "This is the King of the Jews." Rulers, soldiers, and one of the two criminals crucified with him sneer and jeer and revile him. "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." The other criminal rebukes the first, saying, "Have you no fear of God? We have been condemned justly; our sentence corresponds to our crimes. But this man has done nothing criminal." Then he says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

The other readings also have references to the establishing of kings, and the redemption afforded in the kingdom of God's Son. In the first reading from 2 Samuel, the tribes of Israel came to David and said: "When Saul was our king, it was you who led the Israelites out and brought them back. And the Lord said to you, 'You shall shepherd my people Israel.'" And the elders anointed him king of Israel. Psalm 122 proclaims, "To Jerusalem the tribes go up. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord." In the second reading, Paul writes to

the Colossians, "Give thanks to the Father, who delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

With the inscription declaring him King of the Jews right there over his head, this king Jesus is sneered at, jeered at, reviled, and challenged to "Save yourself and us." Little do the jeering ones realize how small of a saving deed they are suggesting he should undertake, compared to the historic scale of the redemptive salvation act that he is already positioned to accomplish. Even in that moment, they still each have the opportunity to get caught up in the momentum of it themselves--the making of peace by the blood of his cross, through him, for all those on earth and those in heaven. Indeed, one of those who has been condemned justly has enough reverence and awareness of God to ask, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And like the better future he offers all who repent and believe, Jesus' response is, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!