

34<sup>th</sup> Sunday (C)

23<sup>rd</sup> November 2025

‘King of Love on Calvary’

2Sam 5: *they anointed David king of Israel.*

Col 1: *He has transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son*

Lk 23: 35–43: *Jesus, remember me, when you come into Your kingdom.*

What comes to mind when you think of “a King”? No doubt if children were asked that question asked they’d eagerly shout out answers like “crowns” and “gowns” and “palaces” and “castles” — the trappings of wealth, power and dynasty. Maybe we would cast our minds back just a month, to the visit of King Charles to Pope Leo in the sublime setting of the Sistine Chapel for the office of Midday Prayer accompanied by the plainchant and polyphony of Royal and Vatican choirs. Or maybe we might think back further to May 2023 when Charles & Camilla were crowned in the ancient splendour of Westminster Abbey, as he took the coronation oath and was anointed king. Historically, as English Catholics, we might hanker after the days a millennium ago, nearly, when our King, Edward the Confessor, was a man so righteous as to have been declared a saint of the Church — his body lies in the shrine just behind the sanctuary where King

Charles was crowned. Some of you from other countries might turn your minds to monarchs or consorts of other kingdoms whose lives were saintly despite the trappings of earthly rule: St Margaret of Scotland, St Louis (IX) of France, St Henry (II) of Bavaria, St Jadwiga of Poland. St Stephen (I) of Hungary, St Wenceslaus (I) of Bohemia, St Elizabeth of Portugal, St Elizabeth of Hungary. On the other hand we might think of King Henry VIII, and what he did in his final decade-or-so of life to undermine the Church in England, to sever its ancient link with Rome, and so ruthlessly to close all the 800 convents, shrines and monasteries of our land. Kingship seems to contain within itself all sorts of ambiguities with regard to faith and spiritual fidelity. I know I’ve listed a few, but admittedly there aren’t that many canonized kings and queens!

Perhaps the greatest kingly monument I’ve ever seen was when I was on pilgrimage to Egypt and visited some of the antiquities for which Egypt is so famous. For example, to see the oldest and largest of the ‘Seven Wonders of the Ancient World,’ the Great Pyramid, built

as the burial place for the Pharaoh Khufu in around 2500BC: 700yrs before Abraham lived and 1,300yrs before Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt. The Great Pyramid stands almost intact, even after all these millennia: 2.5million giant stone blocks! To see such an enormous monument to an earthly king, and to enter right into his burial chamber at the heart of the great pyramid, made me think of the comparison with the King of Kings whose feast we keep today at the culmination of the Church's year: Jesus Christ. *I've been in His tomb, too*, in Jerusalem: one can barely even turn round, it's so small; and even the vast church of the Holy Sepulchre, built to enclose the sites of His crucifixion and resurrection, is tiny compared to the Great Pyramid. But Our Lord Jesus was not about show, drama, displays of power, wealth, or worldly greatness, was He? We know He wasn't. It's the irony of the world, isn't it, that great monuments dignify the achievements, or burial places, of earthly kings, and yet the Son of God, our King beyond all others, has in general left such a small earthly 'footprint'? Yet His message of

His kingship is more eloquent than that of all other rulers of history, and Jesus truly reigns in the hearts of billions of the human race who have lived in the past 2000 yrs — it is estimated that 13bn members of humanity have been Christians across the ages ... of whatever race or age, land or culture: we look to Christ Jesus as *the one* whom we honour with loving allegiance.

His dying in such dreadful indignity on the Cross, reserved for criminals, was made beautiful and powerful by His love and mercy: even in the ultimate moments of His earthly life, His sovereignty of care for the human race shines through. He pleads forgiveness for those who have crucified Him; He grants to the apostle John, and all His followers the maternal care of His blessed mother; He manifests His death as sacrificial, an offering made willingly ("*It is consummated*"); and, as we heard just then in Luke's Gospel, He offers to the last-minute repentant sinner a total forgiveness and a place in paradise.

Surely, as I always am, you were touched by that passage in Lk 23? I can't imagine how *anyone* could fail

to be moved by that scene: our Lord Jesus in the final agony of His crucifixion, nearing the end of His earthly life. Repeatedly, those around Him goad and provoke Him: first the Jewish elders, then the soldiers echo it, and then one of the thieves joins in: “*Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself ... and us!*” Jesus says nothing. He won’t be tempted into abandoning the humanity that He has united Himself with, merely to get out of death, or display His divine power arbitrarily. He speaks only when one of those near Him doesn’t adopt a superior or aggressive tone: the repentant thief humbly acknowledges his sinful life, and simply asks of our Lord that He remember him in the Kingdom. This is the one who is afforded a reply, and not just a reply, but a promise. The others had received nothing from Jesus despite all their prompting; the ‘good thief’ receives everything! He receives forgiveness, and he receives paradise.

It is this repentant thief, then, that sees the true kingship of Jesus. He isn’t looking for majesty expressed in showy displays of power; he is looking only for an

exercise of kingly pardon. *He is the only one who gets it right.* It’s not that he misses Jesus’s being a king — instead *he recognises what sort of a king Jesus is.* The others can’t contemplate a king on a Cross; but the repentant thief sees that Jesus on the Cross is on His throne of mercy — it’s precisely from the Cross, in His abandonment by so much of humanity, that He dispenses His mercy. Those who abandoned Him were many: even in this scene, the several elders, the several soldiers, the other thief hanging there; just *one* there is who turns to the king for mercy, that truly divine gift. In fact, Jesus in His mercy will lavish so much more than that, from the Cross: if you remember, He also gives us His **Mother**, from the Cross, as our Mother; He gives us the **Sacraments** (the “blood and water” flowing from His pierced side); He gives us the promise of **Paradise**, eternal life with Him. To me, this Gospel scene is summed up in four words: “King” ... “Cross” ... “Mercy” ... “Paradise.” Jesus is **King**; but He is King reigning from a **Cross**; from throne of His Cross He dispenses regally His **Mercy**; and the fruit of

that Mercy is, for us, the promise of entry into *Paradise*, His Kingdom on high. We cannot fail to be moved when we see this scene with the eyes of faith, in all its glory!

We're now at the last Sunday of the Church's year, in a Jubilee Year when 'mercy' is so important — a fitting moment to reflect again on the centrality of mercy to our faith in the Lord Jesus. As we celebrate Jesus as Lord and King of all things and of all people and times, we must of necessity see that His mercy is the key. From the Cross itself, which stands at the centre of human history, Jesus lavishes mercy. Please God, each of us has grown, this Jubilee Year, in an appreciation of Jesus's mercy and our desperate need for it! None of us can live without Jesus's washing us clean regularly. Those who stood beneath the Cross and simply told Jesus what He should be doing received no reply; Jesus loved them, but they were not seeking His mercy. It was the one who did ask for pardon who received lavishly the outpouring of Jesus's gifts and promises. "Mercy" ... leads to "Paradise." Let's not forget that! The very reason we seek God's forgiveness

and mercy is that we desire to be at rest one day, and have happiness, in heaven. So, please God, this Holy Year has reminded us, again and again, of the need to confess our sins and be bathed in the cleansing blood of our Saviour. As we end one Church year and embark on another, next Sunday, in Advent, let's make sure that the lessons learnt in this past year are carried forward. It may well be that we need to avail ourselves again of the loving gift of Jesus's mercy in Confession, especially if it's been some months since we last received the Sacrament. If so, make sure that in Advent, some time, you get to Confession: it's that same personal encounter which the repentant thief had with Jesus, who looked at him with love, saw his sorrow for sin, wiped out his sins at a single glance, and promised him Paradise. We will sing, in the beautiful hymn, "Hail Redeemer, King Divine," the words of the chorus, "King of Love on Calvary"? — this is the heart of Jesus's Kingship, and His infinite care for us.

*Lord Jesus our merciful King, may each one of us be moved to seek time and time again Your divine mercy, and so attain Your blessed Kingdom.*