

SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE UNIVERSAL KING
THE KING WHO MADE HIMSELF POOR FOR THE SAKE OF THE POOR
*“I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these
brothers of Mine, you did it to Me” (Matt. 25: 40)*

This Sunday is the 34th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A. It is the Last Sunday in the Churches liturgical year. Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ, The Universal King. All the parables of Jesus concerning the Coming of the Son of Man and the analogies of Kingdom of Heaven we have been reading and listening to these last weeks, culminate in the Readings and celebration of this day when we celebrate Christ’s Kingship over all creation, power, sovereignty and authority. This celebration was introduced into the Church’s liturgical calendar by Pope Pius XI in 1925 to address the socio-political challenges of the time. With the rise of totalitarianism of Mussolini in Italy, Fascism of Stalin in Russia, Nazism of Hitler in Germany and Plutarco Calles’ dictatorship in Mexico, God was gradually thrown out from the oval offices, parliaments and the entire society. There was a steady but harmful growth of secularism and apathy. The Name of Christ was becoming both offensive and an offence! As a response to these false claims to sovereignty and misguided dispositions, Pope Pius XI published the encyclical *Quas Primas*, (11 December 1925) in which he instituted the Solemnity of Christ, The Universal King to challenge the dictators of the time, calling them to acknowledge freedom of worship; immunity of the Church; the supreme sovereignty of Christ, as The King of Kings, to Whom all knees, powers and authority must bend. The Pope intended the celebration to serve as a source of encouragement to Christians to hold firmly to their faith despite all threats, and to make Christ the King of their hearts, minds, bodies and souls. With our Churches under locks and keys, we need this encouragement. At this time, when we are witnessing a culture of fading truth, where facts and truth do not matter, we need leaders, who can stand up and speak on our behalf to the powers that be. The Church needs courageous witnesses now. It is time to enthrone Christ as King of our lives and society by resolute actions.

On this day, I love to share the story of St. Martin of Tours with us. He was a Roman soldier and a Christian. On a cold winter morning, he was on his way to a city when a beggar stopped him and asked for money. Martin had no money on him. But he noticed that the beggar was blue, shivering in the cold. He said to him: “I do not have any money to give, but I will give you what I have.” He took off his soldier’s coat, cut it into half and gave one to the beggar to keep him warm. That night he had a dream. In the dream, he was in a heavenly place with angels

gathered around Jesus. Jesus was wearing an old worn army coat. One of the angels asked Jesus, “Master, why are You wearing such frail coat? Who gave it to You?” Jesus answered: “My servant, Martin, gave it to Me.”

The story of St. Martin of Tours confirms the statement of Jesus in today’s Gospel (Matt. 25: 31-46): “I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did it to Me” (Matt. 25: 40). Jesus identifies with the poor. Today, we celebrate Christ, the King, Who made Himself poor, so that we may have the privilege to serve Him in the poor around us. St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said that the real face of Jesus that we have to see today are the faces of the poorest of the poor, who sit, walk, beg and sleep on our streets. She added that “Poverty is not made by God, but created by you and me when we do not share what we have.” The challenge before us is to share what we have with those who have not. They are the “least of our brothers” that Jesus identifies with Himself.

In the Gospel (Matt. 25: 31-46), Jesus, The Universal King, comes as Judge to separate the sheep from the goats; the good from the bad. He comes to judge each man according to his deeds. The standard of judgement that Matthew presents here is surprising – they look simple. We notice that nothing expensive or complicated is mentioned, like building a Church, buying a car or a private jet for the Pope or pastor, making huge donations, alleviating suffering in the world through global philanthropy and the likes. The standard challenges us to respond to the simple basic needs of the people around us - food, water, clothing, welcoming the stranger, visitation, providing warmth and presence. These are very simple and cost-effective endeavours so that it would cut across. “No one is so poor that he has nothing to offer” St. Pope John Paul II said. The fact here is that what matters is not so much the great things we do, what counts is the simple things we do with great love.

Help Without Expectations: It is easy to help the rich because they could be of help to us in our needy times, but how hard to help the poor who has nothing to offer in return. However, this is the help that pleases God; when we help without expectations. Jesus teaches us to invite the poor, the sick, the lame and the needy, the “least of our brothers” to our feasts and celebrations. Because they cannot pay us back, our reward would be great in heaven. The demand here is to respond to those at the ebb of our society, those whose voices no one hears, whose cries no one listens, and whose conditions no one pays attention. Blessed are they who attend to the needs of these, for to them, it shall be said: “Come, you whom My Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25: 34).

At this time of pandemic and lockdown, there is a greater hunger among us than things physical. As Catholics, we are hungry for the Body of Christ in the Eucharist; and we are thirsty for His Blood. We hunger and thirst for leaders who would dare to stand up against the oppression and suppression of our faith and practice. The people of God are hungry for the whole, unalloyed and unadulterated truths. They are thirsty, but not just for water; they are thirsty for compassion. The people need cloths of family warmth, love and bonding; people are homeless, but they do not need a house but comfort and companionship as well. Those in prison need to be respected, loved and accepted. The sin of our world is the sin of that Rich man against Lazarus – silence, neglect, indifference, apathy (Lk. 16: 19-31). We are too quiet; too cold, and we are too negligent.

My dear friends, as we celebrate this solemnity, uniting with the Church Universal, let us allow ourselves to be challenged to open our hearts to welcome Christ as our King. Let his Will guide our thoughts, words and actions. Let us open wide the doors of our homes and families and crown Him our King. Let us ask for the grace to be able to demonstrate faith by living a life of witnessing. Let us live a life of loving those who do not love us; responding to the needs of the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the sick and those in prison. At this time of pandemic and lockdown, these needs are more real; our sensitivity and responsiveness are in the highest demand. May the Lord help us to be able to love those the world has forsaken.