

SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THE KING "C"
NOVEMBER 20/21, 2010

In our fantasies the possibility of being a king or queen is pretty appealing. We'd be the center of attention, everyone would wait on us hand and foot, we would have everything we want with no financial worries. Best of all, we would never have to do any work! We mistakenly think living this way would be the fullness of life. This is the stuff of fairy tales, or possibly the short-lived reigns of high school or college homecoming queens or kings. On this solemnity of Christ the King Jesus shows us what true royal living is all about.

In the first reading we hear of King David's selection and confirmation as king. The model that David is to emulate as king is that of a shepherd commander. Notice that shepherd occupies first place. By profession shepherds live among their flock, not separated from them. It is the shepherd's responsibility to see that the sheep entrusted to his or her stewardship by the owner are tended well; supplied with adequate food and water, protected from natural and human predators who would maim, kill or scatter the flock. The shepherd is to search out the lost, bind the wounded, and if necessary, put her or his life on the line to defend the flock. The shepherd's role of "commanding" is not that of an absolute dictator, but grounded in self-sacrificial love. History bears all too evidence that the experience of people with the kings in the Bible as well as monarchies down through the ages, has fallen, in many cases, far short of the ideal set forth in the reading from second Samuel. And it is here where we turn our gaze to Jesus.

Today's gospel ushers us into the throne room of Jesus the King, seated not on a gilded chair but nailed to a cross; wearing not a jewel studded tiara, but a crown woven of thorn branches; issuing no royal edict, but hanging under the written sentence of death for being a pretender king, an anarchist. Yet it is in this bloodied, bruised, broken and dying body that God is revealed as the shepherd commander, the model king spoken of in the first reading.

This kingship, indeed the whole of Jesus' life, teaching and ministry, is summed up in the encounter between Jesus and one of the criminals hanging in crucifixion with

him, traditionally known as Dismas. This lost low life by society's standards, with a faith born, no doubt, of desperation, turns to Jesus and says: "*Remember me when you come into your kingdom.*"

Etymologically, the transitive verb "remember" literally means to bring back into wholeness something that has been separated—to "*re-member*" it. The criminal is conscious of his state, he is "lost". He has been far from God. His life, physical and spiritual, is at the point of death and, in these last moments, perhaps having heard about the man hanging next to him sharing his fate of his claims and now the insults hurled at him for what he lived for and the vision he offered, pleads for divine mercy:

"*Remember me.*" *Remember me*, find me, don't lose me, carry me with you where you are going. This simple, heartfelt plea provides the supreme moment for Jesus to reveal the nature and the exercise of the authority of his kingship, "Today, you will be with me in paradise." What Jesus did for this lost and despairing human being, Jesus has done, and stands ready to do for each of us. "*Remember me*" is enough to allow Jesus as shepherd commander king to open heaven for us, regardless what the state of our life now, or in the past has been.

As those who have experienced this divine grace and been made children of the Kingdom by Jesus, today's celebration challenges us to exercise our royal status by, living the same type of self-sacrificing shepherding love for all human beings, especially those we are tempted to, or in fact do, label the "lost", the "sinner". While we don't encounter someone dying on a cross asking for compassion and mercy, we do meet the bedraggled parent with a fussy child, the belligerent young or not so young person struggling through the process of personal growth, the frustrated coworker; the person who has given up hope. Here is where we are called to be kings and queens in the model of Jesus: in breaking the bread of our life, "take, eat, 'This is my body given for you' of pouring out the cup of compassion Take, drink, this is my blood poured out for you". In so doing, we *re-member* the body of Christ our King.