

St Michael and All Angels

Ōtautahi / Christchurch

23 November 2025 / 34th Sunday Ordinary Time

Homily / Christ the King Sunday

Luke 23:33-43

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by watching, but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.” He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Stewardship over Creation

In our modern context, it can sometimes be difficult to refer to Jesus as King with complete confidence, not because we doubt his divine authority, but because, over the centuries, we have not always seen good examples of what it means to be a 'King.' As a result, we question whether it is wise to give the title of 'king' to Jesus.¹

However, we shouldn't confuse our Lord's kingship with that of earthly rulers—not because they're unrelated, but because earthly kings have often failed in their calling. Many misunderstood their spiritual and social responsibilities, forgetting that true kingship means serving God by caring for both people and the world entrusted to them.” Put simply, earthly kings are meant to reflect the Lord's divine care and stewardship over creation. Therefore, the reign of an earthly monarch should represent justice, peace, righteousness, compassion, and order. Sadly, as we know, this has not always been the case throughout our shared history.

Christ the King

So then, how should we understand Christ as King? To begin, throughout Holy Scripture, Jesus has been proclaimed as God's anointed ruler, the Messiah, the one responsible for fulfilling the covenant of grace and peace and God's mediator of heaven's rule on earth. Therefore, Jesus meets the prophetic expectation of a king who: brings justice and peace, shepherds God's people, defeats oppression and evil and establishes God's kingdom on earth. This is why in the Gospels, the 'good news' is often portrayed as the “kingdom of God being with us in the character and presence of Jesus.”²

¹ The Communion Dilemma, *The Challenges of Leading Eucharistic – New Things*, Joshua Cockayne, 2025, (Bede Centre for Church Planting Theology) Page 47.

Cranmer Hall
² Luke 17:20-21

Furthermore, calling Christ king is a wonderfully subversive theological claim both in the ancient world and today. For if we call Jesus Lord and King, we challenge all other forms of authority that seek our allegiance and attention, whether in the physical realm or the spiritual. Calling Christ king also upsets common ideas of power from both ancient and modern times. It proclaims that true authority and kingship are shown through self-giving love and sacrifice, not through oppression and domination. As Jesus says, “I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”³ This is the paradox of a king who reigns by emptying himself and, unlike many earthly rulers, shares in solidarity with the poor, weak, and suffering.⁴

Another aspect of Christ’s kingship is his ‘reign of mercy,’ whereby, from his enthronement on the cross, the first royal act of the crucified king is his declaration of forgiveness. From the cross, we hear Jesus say, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” So even as he is mocked, Christ offers mercy to those who wound him, and this is how the true king reigns — by conquering hatred with compassion.

And in contrast to worldly authorities, the new King rules not by coercion and fear, but through a love that transforms the heart. In doing so, Christ as King embodies final and ultimate authority, reigning not only from the throne of God but also from the cross and the empty tomb, where exile, death, and sin do not hold the final word. The final word, the ultimate merciful judgement, will come from Christ alone.

³ John 10:17-18

⁴ Philippians 2:7

Remember Me

In today's gospel, we hear about the 'good thief' who was put to death alongside Jesus. In this narrative, one criminal mocks Jesus, while the other recognises Christ's innocence and kingship: we hear the thief say, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Note that the 'kingdom' belongs to Jesus. Then, as the story unfolds, we see the "Good Thief" becoming one of the first people in the New Testament to enter paradise — the first "citizen" of Christ's Kingdom. Notice that the 'good thief's' plea is simple, faith-filled, repentant, and hopeful. Christ's reply — "Today you will be with me in Paradise" — reveals the immediate nature of divine mercy but also the supreme authority that only a king would hold, which is to grant access to the kingdom.

Christ's promise to the good thief highlights Luke's focus on the immediate reality of salvation. The Kingdom of God is not a future state but something that is already breaking into the present moment through Christ's mercy. The present reality of this inbreaking affirms that the reign of Christ is not postponed to the end of time; it begins now in the lives of all who accept God's transformative grace, forgiveness, and love.

On this Sunday of Christ the King, we are invited to reclaim the true meaning of Christ's kingship — not as a reflection of flawed earthly rulers, but as the fulfilment of God's promise of justice, peace, and mercy. Throughout Scripture, Christ is revealed as the anointed ruler who brings God's kingdom closer to each one of us through compassion, self-giving love, and the defeat of all that diminishes the fullness of life.

His throne is the cross, his crown is humility, and his first royal act is forgiveness. In recognising Christ as King, we challenge all rival powers that seek our loyalty and affirm that true authority is exercised through sacrificial love. Just as the good thief humbly asked to be remembered, we are also

invited into the living and transformative kingdom of Christ. His reign isn't abstract and remote—it is active within us whenever we accept his mercy and choose to follow his path of love.

Closing Prayer

Almighty ever-living God, whose will is to restore all things through your Son Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, grant, we pray, that all of creation may be set free from the stain of exile, sin, and death, and that the heavens may declare the glory of God. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

Amen