

Christ the King - C
2 Samuel 5:1-3;
Colossians 1:12-20;
Luke 23:35-43
Little Flower - 11/24/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. This feast was instituted by Pope Pius XI at the close of the 1925 Holy Year. Today marks the end of the Year of Faith called for by Pope Benedict XVI.

Although the Kingdom of God will only be realized fully when Christ returns in glory, Jesus proclaimed in Luke's Gospel, "For behold, the kingdom of God is among you" [17:21b]. In today's Gospel, for example, Jesus revealed his kingship to the repentant thief on the cross: "Today you will be with me in Paradise." The kingdom of Christ is within and among us to the extent that we open our hearts to the person of Jesus Christ and live the qualities he taught and lived. According to today's Preface, the kingdom of Christ is "a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace."

Today also marks the end of the church's liturgical year. What a year it has been! Who would have thought that Pope Benedict XVI would resign? Since his election, Pope Francis has taken the church and the world by storm. Many observers have pointed out that the church has not received this much positive attention in years. Pope Francis has taken the world by storm not primarily because of his words but because of his example. Although a Jesuit, he chose the name Francis, and he has tried to model his life on the life of St. Francis, a life of humility and simplicity.

We all know that in recent years many Catholics have left the church either formally or informally. Many who leave are alienated. Many who remain are hurting. Just as Jesus challenged St. Francis to "Rebuild my church," Pope Francis is challenging us to rebuild Christ's church today. He seems to be suggesting at least three ways of rebuilding the church.

Pope Francis has proposed a new image or metaphor for the church: the church must be like a "field hospital after battle." He said, "I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful..."¹ Because of sin, all of us inside or outside the church are wounded, fragile, weak, broken, burdened, vulnerable, sinful people. If we want to rebuild the church, we must minister God's superabundant love and forgiveness incarnate in Christ to each other and to all.

At the USCCB Fall General Assembly, Archbishop Viganò, the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, quoted Pope Paul VI, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if it does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."² If we want to rebuild the church, we must be witnesses more than teachers, and our witness must be consistent with the life and teachings of Jesus.

¹Antonio Spadaro, S.J., "A Big Heart Open to God," *America*, September 30, 2013, <http://www.americamagazine.org/pope-interview>.

²Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #46, as quoted in the Address of Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States to the USCCB Fall General Assembly, Baltimore, Maryland November 11, 2013, <http://www.usccb.org/about/leadership/usccb-general-assembly/2013-november-meeting/nuncio-address-2013.cfm>.

Pope Francis has also suggested the need for Church leaders to listen to the people. The request by the Vatican for input from the people for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family is one example. The Church has to be not only a teaching church but also a church that listens to and learns from its people. If it does not, we can be sure that the numbers of people listening to the Church will continue to decline. If we want to rebuild the Church, we have to become respectful listeners even to those with whom we disagree the most.

My brothers and sisters, I have made these points on the Solemnity of Christ the King because all of us are tasked with building the kingdom of Christ in the world. As we face the challenges in our lives, our Church, and our world, one verse from John's Gospel captures Christ's kingship and gives us hope: *I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but be brave: I have conquered the world* [16:33; JB, 1966].