

Christ the King - C  
II Samuel 5:1-3;  
Colossians 1:12-20;  
Luke 23:35-43  
Little Flower - 11/24/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

On October 23, 2019, Jesuit Father Francis Sullivan died at the age of 97. He was one of my teachers at the Gregorian University where he taught for over 40 years. He was one of the leading ecclesialogists in the Catholic Church. An ecclesialogist is a theologian whose study focuses primarily on the Church. What I remember most from Fr. Sullivan's classes was his distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ.

In today's first reading, David was anointed king of Israel. The Old Testament prophesied the coming of the messiah. In the New Testament, Jesus, the descendent of King David, was revealed to be the promised messiah. More importantly, in today's first reading, the Lord said to David, the king from whom Jesus descended, "*You shall shepherd my people Israel...*" Jesus, therefore, is a shepherd king. Indeed, Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep by name, who leads them where they should go, who watches over and protects his sheep, and who lays down his life for them.

Today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Colossians suggests that Jesus is King of both creation and history. According to Paul, God has "*transferred us to the Kingdom of his beloved Son.*" Christ is Lord and King of all of creation: "*For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth ...all things were created through him and for him... in him all things hold together.*" All things were created through Christ; all things were created for Christ; in Christ all things hold together!

The most powerful part of the three-part statement is that "*in him all things hold together.*" As I mentioned recently, if Jesus stopped loving us or the world for even an instant, we and the world would not die. We and the world would cease to exist! Therefore, Jesus is truly Lord of heaven and earth. On a personal level, what this means is that Jesus has never stopped loving any one of us even for an instant no matter what we may have done, or we would not be here today.

However, Christ is also Lord and King of history and salvation. It is in Him that we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, because "*he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.*" He reconciled us to God and to one another. Therefore, "*he is the head of the body, the church.*"

Today's Gospel recounts the story of the good thief. On the cross, Jesus demonstrated that he is Lord over creation and salvation: "*Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.*" However, I think it also reminds us that just as mercy is the defining quality of God the Father, mercy is also the defining quality of Christ's kingship.

My brothers and sisters, what is the difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ? The kingdom of God will be inaugurated in all its fulness only when Christ returns in glory. At that time, the dead will rise, there will be new heavens and a new earth, and, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, Christ will hand "*over the kingdom to his God and Father,*" and God will be all in all [I Cor. 15:24 & 28].

However, the kingdom of Christ lives within our hearts today. According to today's Preface, the kingdom of Christ is "a kingdom of truth and life,...holiness and grace,... justice, love, and peace." As members of Christ's Body and as members of the Church, Jesus wants us to help create a world in which these values reign in the hearts of all people. For these values to reign in the hearts of all people, we have to change our hearts and encourage others to change their hearts, i.e., to turn away from selfishness and sin and turn toward God, others, and love.