

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
5327 W. Washington Blvd.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Last Sunday of the Church Year  
November 25, 2007  
Luke 23:27-43 (Proper 29 C)

*"The King Remembers"*  
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

## INTRODUCTION

There are several emphases in the Scripture lessons for the Last Sunday in the Church Year. Our new hymnal and its lectionary gives us an opportunity to explore one of them in a different light. Perhaps some of you were surprised when you heard the Gospel lesson read before. It is actually a Good Friday reading. What are we doing on this day, just after Thanksgiving, and exactly one month before Christmas, hearing about the crucifixion of Jesus? How do these words fit the theme for today?

If you were listening closely, there are several clues in the reading. For some time, in many churches, this last Sunday has been observed as the day of Christ the King. And it is in the emphasis on Christ the King that we will see that this reading is very fitting for today. Perhaps it is also a good time to review these words, for while it is true that they are normally read on Good Friday, the number of people attending any of the services on that day does not come close to a regular weekend attendance. Let us consider then the theme: "The King Remembers" on the basis of this word of our Lord for today.

### I. The Road to Calvary

We are on the road to Calvary. Before we arrive there however, it is important to note the link in the words at the beginning of this text with the thoughts from last Sunday. Jesus is one his way to cross. Along the road, as Luke describes it, there are a great multitude of people and women mourning and weeping for him. Jesus tells them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" Here is the solemn warning of the Lord about the judgment to come on Jerusalem and in anticipation of the judgment of the Lord on the world. For the rejection of Jesus would bring its own judgment on the city and those who condemned him. The word of Jesus would be fulfilled.

The next verse states that two criminals were also led away to be put to death with Jesus. This fact will have much to do with our understanding of our theme in just a while. And so Jesus is brought to the Place of the Skull, to Calvary, and there he is nailed to the cross with the two criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. Even in this moment we hear the forgiveness of the Lord for he prays, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." That prayer for the soldiers, for Pilate, for the Jewish leaders, for the crowd that had

cried out for his crucifixion, for us, for all the world is a prayer of great love. Father, forgive them. The Lord is placed on the cross with a prayer of forgiveness on his lips.

### The King Crucified

And in the following verses of the text, there is a reminder of the fact that it is the King who is crucified. Not just any king—THE king. In the mocking of some of those around the cross we hear it. “He saved others, let him save himself, If you are the Christ of God. If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!” And the inscription above his head on the cross says it as well: “This is the King of the Jews.” Had not Pilate asked him, “Are you a king then?” And had not Jesus replied, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Here in these mocking words and in the inscription above the cross is the truth of the word spoken to the angel Gabriel to Mary, “And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 2:32-33) For it is the king who is crucified.

### The King Confessed

And in the midst of the pain and sorrow, in these hours just before death, there is another remarkable reminder of the king. It comes in the words of one of the criminals crucified with Jesus. Though the other Gospels declare that this one also joined in the mockery, something has changed. Perhaps he has observed the way Jesus silently suffers. Perhaps he has taken to heart the prayer of Jesus, “Father, forgive them.” And so he speaks, first in rebuke to the other criminal, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”<sup>42</sup> And then in intercession to the king, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” What remarkable words if you think of it. There is certainly no evidence of a kingdom in this one who hangs naked and bleeding and nailed to a cross. Where is the throne? Where is the glory? Where is the kingdom? But the kingdom is there in truth. For as Jesus himself has said, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself.” This criminal, this sinner, this lost soul, looks to Jesus and prays, “Jesus, remember me.”

### The King Remembers

And the King responds. For the King will remember. The words of Jesus would appear to be just as incongruous as those of the criminal. But they are the words of a royal declaration. “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” What words of blessing and hope and salvation are these words. Today, in spite of all the evidence around you, in spite of the pain and suffering of your imminent death, today, you will be with me in Paradise. Paradise, the garden of the redeemed, the abode of the blessed, the hope of glory. Paradise—the place to be with Jesus. And perhaps that is what is the most important thought in these words—you will be with me. There is not much of a description in Scripture of the

abode of the departed before the resurrection. But in these simple words is enough—You will be with me. As St. Paul could exclaim, “I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.” For as an old Latin saying puts it so well, “Ubi Christus, ibi Paradisus” Where Christ is, there is Paradise.” As a hymn often sung by our choir at funerals states, “My knowledge of that life is small, the eye of faith is dim; but ‘tis enough that Christ knows all, and I shall be with him.”

### The King Remembers Us

And in the words of Jesus to the criminal on that day, is the assurance that the King remembers us as well. In our the epistle for this morning, St. Paul writes, that the Lord has delivered us from the dominion and darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his Son whom he loves, in whom we have redemption, the remission of sins. (Col. 1:13-14) There is the kingdom and we know the king. As this church year draws to a close, and the readings have reminded us again of the certainty of the end of all things, we also have the assurance in His word, that the King remembers us. For it was by his suffering and death upon the cross, by his victory over sin, death, and the devil, that he has won for us a place in his kingdom. In the Gospel of St. Matthew, the Lord speaks of his coming again when all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will say to those on his right hand, “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world.” The kingdom is ours. The promise is ours. Not because of ourselves, but because of the King. And the king is coming soon.

### Conclusion

So, in all our lives and in the things we face day by day, whether times of blessing or times of sorrow, when the sun is shining bright and all seems well with the world or when the world seems to be falling apart around us, we can surely pray with the criminal on the cross, “Jesus, remember me...” And be assured of this: “The king remembers.”

Crown him the Lord of heaven  
Enthroned in worlds above.  
Crown him the King to whom is given  
The wondrous name of love.  
Crown him with many crowns  
As thrones before him fall  
Crown him ye kings, with many crowns  
For he is king of all.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.