



34th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Solemnity of Christ the King



Date: Sunday, November 23, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: 2 Samuel 5:1–3

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 122:1–5 | **Response:** Psalm 122:1

Second Reading: Colossians 1:12–20

Gospel Acclamation: Mark 11:9–10

Gospel Reading: Luke 23:35–43

Preached at: the Chapel of Xolile Keteyi House in the Archdiocese of Durban, South Africa.

The readings today are about a King who reigns not from a throne of gold but from a cross of wood, a King whose crown is woven not from jewels but from mercy, a King who gathers the scattered and steadies the weary by the quiet strength of self-giving love. Dear friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, this is the strange and shining centre of our feast.

Our first reading from the Second Book of Samuel brings us to Hebron, where the tribes of Israel gather around David and say, “We are your bone and your flesh.” They remember the shepherd who watched over them, the companion who walked among them, the leader who listened. Rabbinic tradition sees David’s kingship not in the victories he won but in the people he gathered. His strength lay not in domination but in covenant. His authority began with solidarity.

It is striking that even in our modern world, where monarchy holds little political force, our fascination with kings and queens has not faded. Millions watched the coronation of King Charles III only a few years ago. Something in us yearns for a ruler who is wise, noble, and just. As children many of us loved stories of Arthur and his knights or Aragorn in Tolkien’s world, hoping such kings might exist outside the page. Yet history has taught us again how quickly power bends toward corruption. South Africa knows this sorrow well: the quiet theft of hope through corruption; the slow erosion of trust; the sharp edges of inequality that cut into daily life. Lord Acton’s old warning (“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”) still echoes through our cities and townships.

And yet, if we pray through the eyes of Ignatius and linger in that square at Hebron, we notice a deeper longing beneath our suspicion: a longing for leaders who gather, not scatter; who heal division, not deepen it; who strengthen the bruised reed rather than break it. That longing is holy, because it rests on a truth written into our faith: Christ gathered a people, and in that gathering planted the seed of his kingdom. The Church he founded is meant to be the beginning of that kingdom, marked by unity, holiness, universality, and apostolic mission. Even in our divisions, even in our wounds, Christ keeps working to draw us toward one another, urging us to pray and labour for unity in his name.

The Psalm sings this yearning for togetherness: “I rejoiced when I heard them say: Let us go to God’s house.” Jerusalem is described as a city “strongly compact,” its very stones speaking of communion. The Hebrew hints at weaving and binding. God’s kingdom is never solitary. It is communal, shared, interwoven. And we see that spirit even now in South Africa whenever communities refuse to give up on one another: neighbours sharing food when wages run thin; families helping each other with transport to hospitals; students mentoring younger children in crowded libraries; parish groups carrying burdens that would crush someone alone. These humble acts are small Jerusalems rising in our midst.

Saint Paul widens the vision dramatically in the Letter to the Colossians. Christ, he says, is the image of the unseen God, the One through whom all things were made, the One who holds all things together. Paul’s words rise like cathedral arches, vast and cosmic, but at their centre lies something tender: Christ has brought us into “the kingdom of the Son he loves.” This kingdom is holy because its source is holy. It gathers saints and strugglers alike. Holiness is not the privilege of the few but the vocation of all. And this kingdom is universal, destined for every people, every culture, every language. Its purpose is not conquest but reconciliation, not triumph but transformation. Catholic Social Teaching takes its breath from this truth. When the Church urges us to defend workers, challenge corruption, care for the vulnerable, or insist on fairness in public life, it is because we belong to this kingdom whose royal law is justice shaped by mercy.

And then the Gospel brings us to the moment where the nature of kingship is revealed in full. Christ reigns from a cross. Soldiers laugh. Leaders sneer. One thief joins the taunts, echoing the ancient temptation: “Save yourself.” Power, in

the world's mind, is the ability to escape suffering, to command fear, to dazzle the crowd. But Jesus does not save himself. He saves others.

Ignatius would invite us to stand beside him. To feel the splinters of the wood. To hear the insults. To watch the sky darken. And to look into the face of the crucified King who forgives before he dies. The other thief sees this and prays the purest prayer: "Jesus, remember me." No demands, no pretence, just trust. And Jesus answers with the authority of love: "Today you will be with me in paradise."

This is power in its truest form: not the power to coerce but the power to console; not the power to dominate but the power to dignify; not the power to frighten but the power to free. Christ heals. Christ liberates. Christ teaches. Christ welcomes. Christ creates space for others to discover their own worth. Another King, Martin Luther King Jr, once observed that power without love is reckless, and love without power is anemic. In Christ, power and love are perfectly aligned.

Ignatius captured this in that treasured moment of the Spiritual Exercises called "The Call of the King." In that prayer, Christ stands before us not as a distant sovereign but as one who longs to include us in his mission. He invites us to align our lives with his, to bring our gifts, our wounds, our talents, our hopes, and to labour with him for the good of his people. And because this kingdom is apostolic, built on the foundation of the first ones he sent, we too are sent: as the Father sent him, so he sends us. Parents who love their children with tireless devotion answer that call. Workers who show compassion in their daily labour answer that call. Servants of justice who refuse to abandon the poor answer that call. And martyrs whose last breath is "Viva Cristo Rey" answer that call too.

Among them shines Blessed Miguel Agustín Pro. In the shadows of persecution he used every ounce of his strength to serve the frightened, support the forgotten, and gather the scattered. And in his final moment he stretched out his arms in the shape of a cross and cried, "Long live Christ the King." His life teaches us that true authority flows from love freely given.

And so our unifying image becomes clear: Christ the King gathers what is scattered. David gathered tribes. Jerusalem gathered pilgrims. Christ gathers creation. The cross gathers sinners. The Church gathers the weary. And in our own

South Africa, where so many feel scattered by inequality, political distrust, crime, and the deep wounds of our past, Christ the King calls us to gather one another with courage and compassion.

This morning, let us ask for the grace to use whatever power we hold, however small, to make love real. Let us ask in every choice: How can I be of service? How can my skills, my time, my voice, my resources help gather what is scattered? How can I align my life with Jesus, the King who calls, the King who sends, the King who loves?

And so I leave you with three Ignatian questions for your prayer:

- Where is Christ inviting me to stand beside him at the cross so that compassion, not fear, shapes my choices?
- What part of my life or community feels scattered, and how is God calling me to gather it back into peace?
- How can I use the power I hold, great or small, to make love real for someone this week?

May the King who gathers us lead our nation, our communities, and our hearts into a kingdom of truth, life, justice, love, and peace. Amen.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.