

Father O'Connor's Homily for 23 November 2025
The Feast of Christ the King-C

2 Samuel 5:1-3
Colossians 1:12-20
Luke 23: 35-43

There is a lot of distrust in the world around us. Trust in Church leadership is falling. Confidence in government and politicians is declining.

So where does our longing for trustworthy leadership lead us? To today's feast – Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

It was given to us by Pope Pius XI in 1925, 100 years ago. It falls on the last Sunday of the Church year. Next Sunday opens the new Church year with the First Sunday of Advent.

Pope Pius XI was looking at the world and he saw dictatorships arising. Mussolini [1883-1945] was parading around Italy with arrogance. Hitler [1889-1945] was just released from jail and his scary Nazi party was gaining strength.

Pope Pius XI wanted to remind the world of its Divine Lord and Master. And so he established the Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. And 100 years later, this feast is still timely.

In America, presidents are voted-in one day and voted-out on another. But a king is in office for life. In today's First Reading, from the Second Book of Samuel, David is anointed as the King of Israel, and the people pledge their loyalty to him.

In Jewish thought, if you were loyal to God's anointed one, the king, you were also being loyal to God. But you and I know that King David, who he did a lot of good, also committed some very serious sins. And we know that, with human leadership, there will always be flaws and failures.

So who is the trustworthy leader for us to follow? It is none other than the Son of God and the Son of Mary. And what does Jesus our King teach us about leadership?

Jesus describes Himself in the Gospels by saying, "I have come not to be served by others but to serve" [Matthew 20: 28, Mark 10: 45]. He is our Servant King. That is the kind of leadership that He exercises and that He teaches us to embrace: servant leadership.

In today's Gospel, Jesus, our Servant King, is reigning from His Cross and suffering out of love to redeem us poor sinners. And two thieves are crucified on either side of Jesus.

One, with a very cocky attitude, says, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us."

The other one rebukes him, saying, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly... but this man has done nothing criminal." And then he – the one we call "the Good Thief" or Saint Dismas – says to Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus hears his confession on that cross. And Jesus says to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Someone entitled this Gospel scene, "The Thief Who Stole Heaven." At the last minute, the Good Thief opened his heart to Jesus, and found that Jesus' heart was already wide-open to receive him. That is the kind of leadership that Jesus teaches us to embrace: to be servant leaders with open, loving hearts.

On 1 December 1997, a student at Heath High School in West Paducah, Kentucky took a gun to school and killed three of his fellow students and injured five others. Parents were frantically praying, "Not my child, Lord. Please don't let anything happen to my child."

One mother's prayer was not answered as she had wished. Her daughter, Nicole Hadley, died after that shooting. In spite of her shock and grief, that mother didn't hesitate when doctors asked if she would be willing to donate her daughter's organs to others in critical need.

Time passed, and the mother eventually discovered that her daughter's heart had been gifted in a transplant to a Methodist pastor. She contacted him and asked to meet him.

The day of their meeting, the grieving mother and the grateful pastor talked and prayed and celebrated the life of her precious child who had died so young and so tragically.

And then the mother surprised the pastor by asking him, "May I put my ear next to your heart? May I hear my daughter's heart beating inside of you one more time?"

We are each called to be a person who has received a transplanted heart, the heart of Jesus, within us. There are so many people today who are discouraged with scandals in the Church, with corruption in government,

with violence and terrorism and war, with overwhelming greed in our world, and the outright rejection of God-given morals.

They desperately need to hear the blessed reassurance of our Servant King's beating heart. They need to be able to put their ears next to our hearts and listen to our lives. And know that Jesus Christ our King does indeed live and reign forever. And that He is with us, in our hearts, now and always.

And so we pray that age-old prayer that Pope Francis said that his grandmother taught him when he was a little boy: "Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like Yours. Amen."