

## Christ the King – 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2025

Jeremiah 23: 1-6 – Song of Zechariah – Colossians 1: 11-20 – Luke 23: 33-43

Little Jimmy was given a parrot for his birthday. Supposedly still immature, the bird had already picked up some bad habits, the worst of which was to swear quite loudly, especially when it couldn't get its own way. One day Jimmy's parents had had enough and told him that if he didn't get the bird to behave, it'd be going back to the pet shop. Jimmy had tried everything, but still the bird wouldn't behave. At his wits end, Jimmy spontaneously put the parrot in the freezer and closed the door. And waited for a few moments while it squawked, kicked, and screamed, with the obligatory obscenities and profanities. Suddenly everything went quiet. Jimmy opened the door, afraid that he may have killed the bird. To his amazement, it stepped out quietly and said: "I'm sorry for my awful language and ask if you'll forgive me. From now on, I will try to correct my behaviour." Jimmy was amazed by the complete turnaround, curious at what had caused such a dramatic change, when the parrot continued: "So, tell me, what did the chicken do?"

Whilst today we remember the important celebratory festival of the Feast of Christ the King, we are also called to remember and practice one of the most important and non-negotiable tenets to the Christian faith, which is to forgive. To forgive others, forgive God, and just as importantly, to forgive ourselves. For as Christ the King says, we cannot expect to be forgiven, if we are not prepared to forgive (Luke 11:4).

The Feast of Christ the King is actually a relatively recent celebratory addition to the Christian liturgical calendar. It was initially instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925, not only to honour Jesus' lord and kingship over everything. That is of the universe and all creation, for whom and through whom everything was and is ultimately made and subject (1 Corinthians 15:26; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 2:10), and over which He has been bestowed total authority (Matthew 28:18). But also to counter the increasing secularism that had arisen as a result of the incalculable carnage and brutality of WWI. The feast is also known as the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Christ the King Sunday, and the Reign of Christ Sunday.

Originally Christ the King was celebrated on the last Sunday of October, the day before All Saints Day, and was only moved by Pope Paul VI to the last Sunday of the liturgical calendar year in 1969. This was to better distinguish it as a feast in its own right, aside from All Saints and All Souls Days, also located near the end of October. Being at the end of each liturgical calendar it also served as a reminder that everything we have celebrated from year to liturgical year is encapsulated in the deity and person of Jesus. And what as the second person of the Trinity, He accomplished for all humanity and creation on the Cross. Eternal salvation and reconciliation with the one true living God. And as He left us with that most challenging of commandments, to forgive others that we may be forgiven.

As we all know, how so easily said than done. Many will say that they simply cannot and adamantly will not forgive, such is the enormity and severity of what they have had to endure or overcome for themselves and/or loved ones. A fair and understandable call really, and for which no one would blame them. Even when folk actually apologize, it can still be extremely difficult to forgive. But it is nonetheless non-negotiable. Forgiveness not only releases those being forgiven. But just as importantly frees those required to forgive. For conversely, as is often the case in this world of paradox, the uncomfortable spiritual truth is that if we cannot or will not forgive, then the only person or persons who remain adversely impacted by such unforgiveness are ourselves. As can be found in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35). Like the servant, we end up imprisoned by the toxins of bitterness, resentment, hatred, and hard-heartedness that just keep on festering within our spiritual, mental, and physical beings, the longer we hold onto unforgiveness. Until we repay the full debt of unconditional forgiveness.

It is the very reason we all need a Saviour and King who knows the truth behind everything that motivates all of us in our lives. And who can help us when we find it so difficult to even contemplate forgiving. This

is the blessing for us of course, that in Jesus we have a Saviour, who because He is God, and King over everything, and who has Himself experienced what it is to have to forgive, is therefore able to secure for us the capacity to forgive, the capacity to appreciate that without Him none of us are free from needing forgiveness. Like the second criminal crucified with Jesus that day on Golgotha almost two millennia ago.

We do not know much about that man. Barclay comments that legend says he was a thief, known either as Dismas, Demas, or Dumachus. Interestingly whilst he acknowledged Jesus' innocence, it is not mentioned that he directly asked for Jesus' forgiveness. Yet that he confessed that both he and his unhappy desperado pal deserved their fate when Jesus didn't and then asked to be remembered when Jesus came into His Kingdom was enough to secure that forgiveness and eternity with Christ in paradise. Paradise was a well-known concept to the ancients. It is a Persian word that referred to a walled garden of splendour, where Persian kings would invite honoured subjects to walk with them. To the Jews it represented a place where after death the righteous could spend eternity with God in a state of everlasting happiness. Whether it is the new heaven and earth that is to come at the end of the ages with Jesus' second coming is not clear. And really of little importance here. What was of infinitely more significance was that the criminal confessed his sinfulness and recognized Jesus as his Lord who could bring him salvation.

Perhaps therein lies the reality that we can only truly forgive, truly want to forgive, and experience the capacity to forgive, when we have begun the journey of acknowledging and believing that Jesus is Lord and Saviour over our lives. Because when we forgive as difficult as that can be, with Christ's continued help, Christ also reveals those parts of our old natures that operate to prevent us from wanting to forgive. And which must die. This is why, as Christ's disciples, we can't be reminded enough of the imperative to forgive. Because none of us is ultimately capable of being free from the curse of sin with all its inherent baggage. Including excuses not to forgive. Especially in light of the ongoing struggles of sin and the flesh we are called to confront and overcome as we progress through our daily journeys of purification. Not that that denigrates or gives cause to despise the human though frail bodies we have as parts of God's Temple, the Body of Christ either. To which Paul was attempting to correct when writing from prison to the Colossians.

It is speculated that Paul was writing to counter a syncretic form of fear-based heresy, that had crept into the Colossian Church. This "Colossian Heresy," incorporated ascetic teachings of pagan mysticism, Gnosticism, and Jewish wisdom practices, where redemption was primarily based on works rather than through faith in Jesus. Such as denying our physical and therefore evil selves to attain the wisdom necessary to secure reconciliation with God, which essentially negates Jesus' divinity and so the efficacy of the cross. Paul reminds that while Jesus is divine, He was still born of a fully physical human and so frail body too. And that true spirituality comes as much, though perhaps even more, from engaging in the earthiness of everyday human physical existence. As Jesus Himself did. In a relationship of humble obedience to God. Caring for the unwanted and disadvantaged and challenging the corruption inherent to our societies and communities, as Jeremiah prophesied God would one day bring to full fruition. Rather than in seeking spiritual enlightenment and atonement by acquiring hidden knowledge and holding to esoteric rituals.

In all if anyone had cause to not forgive it was Jesus. Cruelly and unjustly left to die the most torturous and humiliating death imaginable. Forsaken, a criminal amongst criminals on that cross. Yet forgive He did. Empowered by the fullness of God who was pleased to dwell in and through Him. As through Jesus all things are made and have indeed been reconciled back to God. Enabling us to be forgiven as much as empowering us to forgive. Blessing and so interceding for those we are called to forgive. As the Holy Spirit can begin or continue to reveal more of the reality of Jesus and the blessings of forgiveness to them. Will it happen overnight? Most likely no. But in time, if we persist, if we continue to ask and give thanks, it will happen. As we come to discover the many blessings that will ensue not only for ourselves, but for all when called to forgive. Sharing in the inheritance of all the saints. In Paradise with Jesus Christ, the one true King.

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