

Christ the King

“I give thanks for you all, making mention of you in my prayers.”

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The feast of Christ the King which we celebrate this morning marks the end of the Christian year.

The iconography of this feast can appear, feel a little overbearing , too male, too hierarchical, with crowns, thrones, kneeling supplicants. Our imagination has been captured by past medieval imagery with its expression of elevation distance, difference, deference.

Christ up there untouchable, while we prostrated in awe. A medieval court, which has no relation to the reality of the risen Lord cooking breakfast for his disciples on Easter Day.

We need to look at this feast day through another lens.

Today, is a day of thanksgiving , thanksgiving that God providential care for each one of us will triumph it is a celebration of his love for us.

The God who has looked after us in the past will also be with us in our future because the future is His.

We are giving thanks for his continuing love towards us.

Love is a many – splendored thing and, like a jewel held up to the light, shines with an array of colours. His love for us expresses itself in countless ways today we give thanks.

Thanksgiving is one of the central themes in the letters of St Paul. A New Testament scholar describes **“Thanksgiving as the heartbeat of the New Testament, a pulsating centre that pumps life into the whole body”**.

William Law, a 17th Century Anglican Bishop wrote:

“Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? It is not he who prays most or fasts most, it is not he who gives most alms or is most eminent for temperance, chastity or justice, but it is he who is always thankful to God, who wills everything that God wills, who receives everything as an instant of God’s goodness and has a heart always ready to praise and thank God for it.”

“If anyone would tell you the shortest, surest way to all happiness and all perfection, he must tell you to make it a rule to yourself to thank and praise God for everything that happens to you, for it is certain that whatever seeming calamity that happens to you, if you thank and praise God for it, you turn it into a blessing.”

Well that is quite a claim even calamity can be a blessing through thanks giving. This can seem impossible at times but Paul, writing in prison, is insistent on this sense of being thankful in all situations.

In his letter to the Thessalonians he bids his readers to give thanks **in** everything. In his letter to the Ephesians he writes that they are to give thanks **for all things**.

But what about those adverse and painful situations we find ourselves in? Are we supposed to give thanks for these aspects of our lives? We offer our thanksgiving in faith, placing the situation in God’s hands and laying ourselves open in the fullest manner possible to the outpourings of His grace.

By being thankful, we are trying to place the situation in a larger perspective, trusting in the ultimate triumph of love, letting go of our fears and anxieties and allowing God to do something **within us**. We may not be able to change a situation but with God’s grace we can change our response to it.

Words that always hit home for me when I celebrate the Mass on the night that he was betrayed Jesus takes the bread and gives thanks. He knows what is about to happen , there is no complaining he simply gives thanks.

Jesus embraces the reality He is in, with a confidence that God’s transforming love will take the act of betrayal and transfigure it.

Thanksgiving does not come naturally to us. A sense of gratitude that everything we have, everything we enjoy, is pure gift. We live in a culture of entitlement and rights.

If we have this attitude, this disposition of gratitude in every situation, seeing it as a gift from God, however painful or joyful, however exhilarating or bewildering we will experience it in a different kind of way.

We will experience it in a new way, we will be more open and available to perceive something of God’s own life and love within it, enlivening it with creative possibilities.

Practising the art of gratitude in all situations slowly releases us from that negative spirit that simply drags us down and distorts everything around us.

Being thankful opens us up to what God has yet to give us, now and tomorrow.

This is what today's feast is all about – the sovereignty of Christ in all things.

The incarnation is about God in Christ, flooding the whole of His creation with his life and love.

We are no longer separate from God. This king, his life is in some mysterious way, enthroned within the fabric of our lives.

Praise and thanksgiving involves acceptance. If you praise God, thank God for your children or your friends, it means you have accepted them. And this same thanksgiving for others we can offer towards ourselves. We can be thankful for the whole of our lives with all its blemishes, oddities, sinfulness. Everything can be transformed through a sense of gratitude. To be thankful for something is to bless it ... to make it holy.

Robert Llewelyn in his book "Our Duty and our Joy" writes:

"Christ transfigures everything in us – the good as well as the bad – in every person there is a wound. Moan about this wound and it becomes a torment. Transfigured by Christ it becomes a place of energy, a source of creativity, giving rise to a potential for communion, fellowship, understanding. Therefore, to be continually looking God-ward in a spirit of praise and thanksgiving, in whatever work we undertake, is to enable this transfiguration to take place".

On this feast day let us pray for that gift of gratitude that grace to continually **look Godward** *in a spirit of thanksgiving* and in so doing allowing that transfiguration to take place within the whole of our experience, to His praise and glory.

Amen