

November 24, 2019 Abdicating the Throne of The Cross: In 1936, England faced a grave constitutional crisis. The reigning sovereign, King Edward, was determined to marry the woman he loved, a twice divorced American socialite named Wallace Simpson. His plan met with stiff opposition from many quarters, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, members of Parliament, the press and even members of the Royal Family. Undeterred, the King refused to budge. Rather than abandon Mrs. Simpson, he made the painful decision to abdicate the throne. He later married her in a ceremony not recognized by the Church of England, of which Edward was the nominal head. Needless to say, it was a huge scandal, and widely covered by the international media. One of the leading political figures of the day, Winston Churchill, was appalled by the King's reckless and foolish act. Churchill could not conceive of anyone surrendering the English throne for any reason whatsoever. England's throne was the glory of the English nation.

Today, the Church ends the liturgical year on a triumphant note. She celebrates the feast of Christ the King. In today's gospel from St. Luke (Lk. 23:35-43), the cross is the royal throne of the King of Kings and the crucifixion is his coronation. Jesus was crowned with thorns by people who shouted, "We have no king but Caesar". At the end of his life Jesus was faced with one final temptation, namely, to come down from the Cross.

Jesus did not come down from the Cross. He remained nailed to the wooden beams and in that way gave his life for sinners. The measure of the King's greatness is that he lays down his life for his subjects.

It is interesting to note that the so-called Good Thief does not ask Jesus to come down from the Cross. Instead, he says, "Remember me when you come into your Kingdom". (Lk.23:42) He recognizes His supreme authority and entrusts himself to Him as his life draws to a close. He truly believes that what is written on that plaque above Jesus' head is true, "The King of the Jews".

What lessons are to be derived from today's gospel?

First, as disciples of Jesus, we are called to be with Jesus and not ask him to come down from the Cross. We are to stay with Him, following the noble example of his mother and the Blessed disciple who were close to him at the foot of the Cross.

Ironically, we hear the strident voices of those who do not believe: Israel's rulers, the soldiers, and a criminal dying alongside him... calling him by His exalted titles of "Messiah", "Chosen One", and "King". Even in our day the ones who speak loudest about our King are those who have an ax to grind with his church. Christ may not be worshipped, but He is certainly not ignored. "Come down from the Cross" are words spoken daily to the disciples of Our King. Like Jesus, our temptation is to abandon the Cross where Christ reigns. And he wears a crown of thorns.

There is a remarkable legend concerning the first Christian King of Jerusalem. On the day of his coronation, he was presented with a magnificent crown of gold by his grateful subjects. Unexpectedly, the King refused to accept it. He said that it would be highly inappropriate to be crowned with gold in the very city in which his Lord and Savior was crowned with thorns. The only crown worthy of the new King is made of thorns and not of precious metal. Such a view is respectful of the portrait of Jesus

according to the Evangelist, St. Luke, and is intended to underscore the radical difference between His kingship and that of the mighty rulers of this world who desire power, honor and wealth, and which is symbolized by a priceless crown. Nothing could point up the contrast more strongly than the crucifixion of Christ.

St. Paul speaks derisively of those who are “enemies of the Cross”. On the Cross, Jesus, the king of the universe, draws everyone to Himself. (Jn. 12:32) And the closer we draw near to Jesus, the better view we have of the one who “loved His own in the world and loved them to the end”. (Jn.13:1) We see a crown soaked in blood and hear the words of a royal figure whose last word’s in Luke’s gospel of the passion is a consoling promise of a future reunion in paradise. (Lk. 23:43)

Amen!