

## Fr Dispin John – Homily 34<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time 21/11/2020 St John's Mitcham

When Jesus was arrested and questioned by Pilate, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus's response was: "You say that I am a King? Yes. For this. I was born for this. I have come into the world." Then he was spat upon crowned with thorns and then placed on a cross to die a miserable death.

You walk into any Catholic church in the world, you will most probably encounter the crucifix, like the one here, like the one above me. And on that crucifix, you will have something like I N R I, which is also written on this one, which means Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. And then in the Our Father we say - "Thy kingdom come".

So consciously or unconsciously, we use this language. This language, the imagery, and the concept is very much part of what we believe and who we are as a community of believers. But what does this actually mean to us? And more particularly on this feast we celebrate today. Jesus declares that he's a king and we are a kingdom people. How do we display this kingdom? What are the characteristics of this kingdom? And if we are a kingdom people, as subjects of this kingdom, how do we conduct ourselves to please the King

At the beginning of his ministry, public ministry, Jesus is tempted and here a devil is telling him, "Jesus, you know, do this and you will be King. Like you can turn this stone into bread. You know, this is great." Taking him into the parapet of the temple, he says, "you know, look at this and bow before me and I will make you the King."

We are not a people belonging to a kingdom of magic or power. It's a different kind of Kingdom. At the time where people exercise extreme levels of power to prove who they are and how powerful they are, we are talking of a King who subjected himself to the cross to give us life.

So the authority of Jesus is questioned again and again, by the Pharisees. And on whose authority is he talking? At whose authority is he subjecting the nature, the wind, the fire. They listened to him.

And Jesus says, "My authority comes from the Father."

But today Jesus gives us one final example of what that kingdom is like.

When we were studying in the seminary back in my first attempt in Mumbai, some of us decided to leave the seminary and to go and live in the slums. And the slums in Mumbai are nothing that you can imagine unless you have actually been there yourself. And, more particularly, if you've been there on one of those monsoon days, when you have to wade through this dirty water to get to your house, which was a small room without a toilet. And when we lived in those slums, surrounded by hundreds of thousands of people who lived in abject poverty without any facilities, one of the questions we often encountered in our prayer was, how can Christ be still their King? If these people are suffering, Is Christ real, is the kingdom real?

The question today? When did we see you naked? When did we see you in prison? When did we see you sick, hungry, or thirsty? It is the refusal to see the message of Jesus to reflect in our everyday life. The blindness of our comfort. I am happy where I am, so I don't need to look outside. It is that comfort and convenience that can sometimes define ourselves. To those on the left, the King is saying eternal punishment. Not because they were terrible people, murderers and liars and whatever. He didn't say that, but you neglected something that you ought to have done.

So, crime or sinfulness, according to this King that we celebrate today, is not just those terrible things that we name as bad people or sinful people. Jesus is setting the standard very high. If you choose to be a kingdom person, Jesus is setting it very high. Bad luck. You have said yes to this kingdom. And Jesus is

saying, if you have neglected any of these kingdom duties of looking after the poor, the needy, the refugees, the orphans, those elderly neglected people, the destitute, the distressed, you have a serious problem. It's not all gloom and doom. The kingdom is already here, but not yet. It's the reality that you and I must work together every day of our lives. It's a reality that belongs to us.

The feast of the kingdom also comes at a very good time, I believe. You know, the whole of the liturgical year travels towards this particular event, declaring Christ. So 33 weeks of our liturgical calendar, we live a good life and we say, isn't it wonderful to celebrate, to come and celebrate our Lord. And all these weeks we encounter Christ in different aspects, through different stories, parables and events in the life of Jesus. And we come to this moment saying to Jesus, "You know what, thank you, Jesus. We have lived by your word. And today we have the right to come and celebrate you as our King". It's a great thing to do. And especially, given what we have gone through with this pandemic and the separation, today's feast is a beautiful occasion to say that Christ never abandons us. Christ is here and it is worth celebrating. So as a kingdom people let us celebrate our King, not just in words, but in deeds that will reflect who he is to us and what we are called for every day and how we are lifted up. When we lift up others in need.

Happy Feast.