

## Cycle C Our Lord Jesus, Christ the King

### Reading 1 2 SM 5:1-3

*In those days, all the tribes of Israel came to David in Hebron and said: "Here we are, your bone and your flesh. In days past, when Saul was our king, it was you who led the Israelites out and brought them back. And the LORD said to you, 'You shall shepherd my people Israel and shall be commander of Israel.'" When all the elders of Israel came to David in Hebron, King David made an agreement with them there before the LORD, and they anointed him king of Israel.*

### Reading 2 COL 1:12-20

*Brothers and sisters: Let us give thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light. He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven.*

### Gospel LK 23:35-43

*The rulers sneered at Jesus and said, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God." Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews." Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*

There is a St. Francis of Assisi legend from the 13<sup>th</sup> century about a ferocious wolf who terrorized the inhabitants of the small Italian town named Gubbio. Not only did the wolf kill and devour livestock but it began to attack and devour humans. All attempts to kill the wolf failed and the people shut down the town in fear whenever the wolf appeared. St. Francis heard of this and decided to go and meet the wolf. The huge wolf rushed toward Francis as soon as he saw the saint approaching, but when St. Francis made the sign of the cross, immediately the wolf became docile. He called out to the wolf: “Come to me, Brother Wolf. I wish you no harm.” At that moment the wolf lowered its head and lay down at St. Francis’ feet, meek as a lamb. St. Francis explained to the wolf that he had been terrorizing the people, killing not only other animals, but humans as well. “Brother Wolf,” said Francis, “I want to make peace between you and the people of Gubbio. They will stop trying to harm you and you must no longer harm them. All past wrongs are to be forgiven.” Francis told the wolf that if he ended his attacks he would see to it that the inhabitants of Gubbio would provide him with the food he needed. The story goes that the wolf placed his paw in Francis’ hand in agreement. Francis then walked the docile wolf back into the main square of Gubbio to the astonishment of the people, and there he reiterated the promise. Again the wolf placed his paw in the saint’s hand in agreement. The wolf lived among the villagers for years. When the wolf finally died of old age, the people of Gubbio were sad. The wolf’s peaceful ways had been a living reminder to them of the patience, virtues and holiness of St. Francis. It had also been a living symbol of the love and mercy of the living God.

The Scriptures today tell us that Jesus is the King of all creation. We are reminded how great Jesus is as He is named *the image of the invisible God; the firstborn of all creation; the source of all created things; the head of the body, the church; the beginning; the firstborn from the dead*; and the crucified *King*. Jesus is our King in all these ways and infinitely more. Today is the feast of Christ the King. How fitting it is that we celebrate Jesus on the last Sunday of the Year of Mercy...The mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, our King and Savior.

Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but he is more approachable than our modern-day kings who have to be surrounded by security. He is a king who is a servant, not distant royalty. And Jesus is here with us, not out there somewhere where we have to go to Him....He is present right here with us today in the Word of God we heard today, in the Eucharist we celebrate from this altar, and in every one of us, His body, the Church.

Today we find ourselves, by the power of the Gospel we've just heard, standing by the Cross, watching Jesus. We have heard a passage from the Passion of the Christ according to Luke. Jesus has been crucified. Here in this exchange is caught and condensed the whole meaning of what was happening: the forgiving, the acquitting, the life-giving death and the resurrection of Jesus...its capacity to take any of one us, however down among the dregs we are, it takes us somewhere else, somewhere better...in fact, forever. *"Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."* God's love and mercy shine through in the last human exchange of Jesus' life. And as we leave this Year of Mercy, we might leave wondering: How can we enter into the kingdom of Christ? The readings give the answer. There is nothing so regal...there is nothing that so lifts the darkness...there is nothing that so brings His kingdom into our hearts and the world, as Jesus Christ Himself ...He is our King and Savior, who forgives the sinners and loves the unlovable.

So this year we need to ask who are the wolves of Gubbio in our lives and how are we dealing with them? Are we like the villagers who went out and were defeated, or like St. Francis who went to tame the wolf, not destroy it? When we approach the snarling wolf do we make the sign of the cross, not relying on our own resources but rather calling on that perfect love and mercy from Jesus Christ? Do we recognize that the wolf was acting out of hunger? So often we sin not out of pure malice but rather out of our own hunger, need and fear. Francis knew this and sought to heal the root cause...and the saint did this by bringing the wolf back into relationship with the very ones he had been terrifying! It was the people of Gubbio and their relationship with the wolf that allowed the wolf to overcome his hunger, need and fear. Francis does not tame the wolf and then send it off to

a distant land. No. The process of taming continues within the wolf's ongoing relationship and life with the townspeople. So, are we seeking true justice and true healing in our relationships? We have to move beyond the sad logic and bitter cycle of hatred and violence, of pride and prejudice in our world. It will only be God's love and mercy that allows us to do so.

One last thought. How often do we yearn for God and listen for His voice...yet so easily we disregard the very thing we yearn for most? Do we see that many times the strongest and most terrifying wolf who does the most damage is not someone else, but is within us. We all have a wolf within. The question is to what extent is that wolf ravaging and to what extent will it be tamed?

This week I was reminded of a gift I received as a child. It's a gift we have all received and we learn to share it, but most of the time we really don't appreciate it. You see, I recalled being a five-year-old praying with my mother at bedtime. "*...Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in Heaven...*" I opened the gift after she left...I continued to pray and talk with God....and, I haven't stopped yet.

So I invite you now to pray with me to Christ the King: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen!"

Alleluia! Alleluia!