

I know we're not even at Thanksgiving yet, but we just received approval from the bishop to have the 3:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Mass time so I thought I'd let you know. We are keeping the same schedule that we had last year. The 3:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. Masses were the best attended last year so that seems to be the right decision. It's also much easier to find musicians at these times than for a midnight Mass! Christmas Day will have the normal Sunday Mass offerings of 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Spanish.

One of the most common questions the kids from school or RE ask is: "What is the INRI above Jesus's head on the crucifix?" The letters that we see on crucifix's are an abbreviation of the Latin when there was no letter "J" in the Latin alphabet. It says "Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum," "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews." As the liturgical year comes to its close, we commemorate that Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, is the King of the Universe.

We often think of and portray kings as powerful people, in charge, giving orders and being respected, perhaps depicted on a regal throne. Yet that is not how Jesus was treated. Three different times in this passage it says that Jesus was mocked, reviled, and jeered at: "***He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God.***" The Lord underwent a humiliating beating, was stripped of His cloths, was executed by the Romans along with criminals and was ridiculed by them in the process.

I always get chills when I hear this passage and meditate on how terribly the Lord was treated, yet He is God! The Jewish leaders wanted further signs if they were to believe in Jesus. The Roman soldiers respected earthly strength and power. The wicked criminal wanted an escape from the punishment of his crime. They showed no respect, no honor, no consideration for the one they were speaking to, who was sent to help them, to save them. Jesus Christ's power was manifest in humility, not through boasting, earthly power, or pride. We know that Jesus prayed to the Father asking for the people to be forgiven, because they didn't know what they were doing, but this Gospel selection on this Solemnity should be a healthy warning for us.

Only the good thief brings a proper mindset to this moment when he says to the other criminal: "***Have you no fear of God...***" St. Dismas, as he is now called, did not expect more proofs from Jesus, he admitted he was guilty of crime and sin, and was in no position to demand anything from Him. Rather, his tone and language revealed that he recognized that Jesus Christ was the real king, but not of this world. He was humble, contrite, faithful, and hopeful.

There may be times when we wonder what the Lord is doing, if He really is caring about this troubled, fallen world anymore. It is good to tell the Lord about our fears and concerns honestly, but respectfully like Job who complained but never cursed God. May we grow in the capacity to speak honestly and humbly to God even when the cross feels heavy, like St. Dismas so we can hear the Lord's response:

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

He replied to him,

"Amen, I say to you...you will be with me in Paradise."

God bless!

