

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe
AMS Annual Benefit Mass
19 November 2022



Many stories were told about the visionary founding pastor of my home parish, Father John Mary Powers. He had very clear ideas about the church he was going to build and it took him 37 years to collect the materials and build a magnificent structure. It was said that he thought an artist would be honored to paint the images for the sanctuary area. Of course, artists also have to eat. Consequently, the image in the center of the reredos behind the tabernacle on the main altar is a copy of Guido Reni's crucifixion whose original hangs in the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina in Rome.

The painting commands your attention the moment you enter the nave. That same scene dominates today's Gospel on the Solemnity of Christ the King. He teaches us that to reign is to serve, challenges us to be ministers of reconciliation, and reveals a unique throne: the cross.

The Second Book of Samuel describes King David as the shepherd of His people. It is also the perfect image for the definitive King of the Universe, Jesus Christ. "He gives His life, His very body, for us. That is His royal power—the power of love and not of domination."¹ His self-giving allows us to hope for the fullness of life. His sacrifice, the gesture of supreme love, defeated the devil, sin, death, and hell. "That supreme act of love, which seemed [in the view of the foolish] to be the supreme weakness, was in fact the supreme power. Jesus is the King of Kings because His crown is made of something more precious and powerful than gold: it is made of thorns."²

We are challenged to draw near to the cross to learn about self-giving and we gather this evening to support the ministry to men and women who give and have given of themselves to protect our Nation, serve the cause of liberty, and strengthen the defenseless in the face of oppression.

¹ Peter Kreeft, *Food for the Soul*, p. 667.

² *Ibid.*

In a powerful passage from his Letter to the Colossians, St. Paul reminds us that Jesus reconciles all things to Himself. In saving us, Jesus saved the whole universe. Part of the priestly role we all received at baptism was to promote reconciliation. Our world needs that gift. It is so divided. We see the unjust war in Ukraine, tensions in the Middle East, disorder in Haiti, numerous conflicts in Africa, and dangerous threats in the Far East. We pray for peace and we strive to draw on the power of Christ and to insert His order and peace in all creation.

Pope Francis emphasizes this duty and possibility. "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home.... Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest. Young people.... wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded."³

The last theme is the gesture of mercy that flowed from the throne of the cross. Most of us would find the experience of the Good Thief foreign. We probably do not steal, have not known the poverty and misery that was his lot. We have been raised in one of the best possible countries and have benefitted from good educational possibilities. Yet, Dismas, heard the only words that we long to hear at the end of our pilgrimage of life: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Lk. 23:43).

Twenty-one years ago when I was appointed the titular archbishop of Amiternum, I chose a motto from St. Luke's Gospel "Querite Regnum Dei", because it seemed to me to sum up the purpose of our journey. We want to dwell with Him for all eternity and we have been charged to invite the whole world to know Him and be saved by Him.

When I think about any initiative of this global archdiocese, I always think about it in terms of announcing the message of salvation, of opening the door to Christ, and of letting others know about the immense love that Christ has poured out upon us. Confirmation obliges us to be witness to Christ. The Sacred Chrism smeared on our foreheads in the sign of the cross was an empowering and an invitation to permeate the world with the fragrance of Jesus Christ.

We remember today that Christ's power is real, but not exercised with violence or with external force, but rather with a profound influence on the heart and by means of this influence on human history. "The writing is correctly placed above the Cross, because even though the Lord Jesus was on the Cross, yet his royal majesty shone from the height of the Cross."⁴

³ Pope Francis, *Laudatosi*, 13, 24.V.15.

⁴ St. Ambrose, 10, 113.

The cross has always been a reality in the history of the military mission. From the Revolutionary War to the fratricide of the US Civil War to the bloody struggles to liberate Europe and Asia from oppression in two world wars, Korea, Vietnam, and the liberation of Iraq men and women have shown incredible courage and generosity. Their openness to suffer for others continues to inspire our gratitude, generosity, and imitation.

What is important is the ability to recognize the essential, to focus on Christ, and to seek to hear the message uttered to the Good Thief. St. Teresa of Avila, a mystic who was no stranger to suffering, challenges, and a less than easy life, remarked that when we look back on the most arduous earthly life from the vantage point of heaven, it will look “no more serious than on night in an inconvenient hotel.”⁵

Perspective is so important. Sometimes like St. Martha, we are anxious and busy about many things and we fail to remember what serves the ultimate goal. Ministry to the men, women, and families this gathering benefits recognizes the value of their commitment and affirms their understanding of what is truly important. We strive to learn from them and from you who have served, as well.

I grew up contemplating the image of Christ Crucified. He certainly called me to the priesthood. He never fails to call us and to invite us to share what we have received. At the end of our earthly pilgrimage, we want to hear: “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Lk. 23:43).

⁵ As quoted in Kreeft, *op. cit.*, p. 672.