

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski

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Mary and I enjoy watching television shows that have an interesting and engaging plot within a relatively short time frame; an hour or two at the most. I tend to avoid shows with plots that drag on over multiple episodes or seasons because I don't want to commit the time required. However, I must admit that with the advent of streaming, I can watch shows with multiple episodes on my time schedule. One exception to my rule is the series, *The Chosen*, which covers the Gospels over seven eight-episode seasons. (We love this portrayal of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.)

That said, I have violated my own rule with this homily because it's a continuation of the homily I preached at daily Mass a week ago Thursday. You see, in that homily I suggested that there are many individuals mentioned in the Bible, plus those in the Communion of Saints, who we greatly admire and venerate.

But among those are two of whom I am particularly envious. The first is Solomon, the son of King David. I envy Solomon because, when asked by God to choose ANYTHING, he asked God for "a listening heart...to distinguish between good and evil;" he asked for WISDOM. But, in that homily, I never identified the second individual who I particularly admire and told those assembled that day that they needed to wait until this homily today to hear the answer. Since I've brought you up-to-date on what happened last time on "*homilies by Deacon Jim*," now the conclusion...

In today's gospel, we hear of "rulers [who] sneered at Jesus" as he hung upon the cross; "even the soldiers jeered at him." Most outrageous, even "one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus" with the taunt "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." Only the "other criminal" hanging on the other side of Jesus displayed any humanity with his rebuke of that first criminal, followed by his simple prayer to Jesus: He said "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

That other criminal, unnamed in the Gospels but who tradition identifies as Dismas or "the good thief," admits his sin, accepts his suffering and opens his heart to the transformative power of Christ. As described by St. Faustina, he experienced a "heartfelt repentance [which] immediately transforms the soul." (Diaries, 388) Unlike the "bad thief," Dismas knows that the life he lived on earth deserves death, but he has not given up hope in the life to come. In one moment of humility and faith, he acknowledged that Jesus is "King of the Universe"—the Solemnity we celebrate today—and in return, received the promise of paradise.

St. Dismas is regarded as the patron saint of condemned prisoners, repentant thieves, funeral directors plus all those who find themselves in desperate need of redemption and divine mercy. He's a reminder that it's never too late to turn back to God. In this Jubilee Year of Hope, the story of St. Dismas is one of hope to all who feel far from God's grace. In his final moments, with nothing left to offer but faith and repentance, Dismas received reward beyond human imagination.

St. Dismas teaches us that holiness is not about perfection, but about repentance and that God's mercy is greater than any sin; even the most broken of us is NOT beyond the reach of God's love.

If it isn't clear by now, St. Dismas is that second individual of whom I am envious because he holds a unique place in Christian history: He's the only person canonized directly by Jesus himself with the words "...today you will be with me in Paradise." May we, like Dismas, turn to the King of kings, Christ the Lord, with confidence, trusting that he always hears the voice of the repentant heart.