

GOSPEL

MATTHEW 27:32-44

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son."' The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Jesus' revelation of himself as king is most clearly seen in the event of the Cross! Those who look at the Cross cannot but see the astonishing gratuitousness of love. One of you could say, "Father, that was a failure!". In the failure of the Cross, love is seen, a love that is gratuitous, which Jesus gives us. For a Christian, speaking of power and strength means referring to the power of the Cross, and the strength of Jesus' love: a love which remains steadfast and complete, even when faced with rejection, and it is shown as the fulfillment of a life expended in the total surrender of oneself for the benefit of humanity. On Calvary, the passers-by and the leaders derided Jesus, nailed to the Cross, and they challenged him: "Save yourself, and come down from the cross!". "Save yourself!". But paradoxically the truth of Jesus is precisely what is hurled at him in a mocking tone by his adversaries: "he cannot save himself!". Had Jesus come down from the Cross, he would have given in to the temptations of the prince of this world. Instead, he cannot save himself precisely so as to be able to save others, precisely because he has given his life for us, for each one of us. To say: "Jesus gave his life for the world" is true. But it is more beautiful to say: "Jesus gave his life for me". And today, in this place, let each one of us say in his or her heart: "He gave his life for me, in order to save each one of us from our sins".

The kingship of Jesus doesn't oppress us, but rather frees us from our weaknesses and miseries, encouraging us to walk the path of the good, of reconciliation and of forgiveness. Let us look at the Cross of Jesus, let us look at the "good thief", and let us all say together what the good thief said: Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom". All together: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom". Ask Jesus, when we feel that we are weak, that we are sinners, defeated, to look at us, and say to him: "You are there. Don't forget me".

Faced with so many lacerations in the world and too many wounds in the flesh of mankind, let us ask the Virgin Mary to sustain us in our commitment to emulate Jesus, our king, by making his kingdom present with gestures of tenderness, understanding and mercy.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What images or emotions arise for you as you read this Gospel?
- This scene of the cross is bleak. Yet Jesus says clearly, that if we are to follow him, we too must pick up our cross and engage with suffering as well, responding with love and perseverance in the midst of difficult things. What sufferings have you or might you be called to join to the suffering of Jesus, as part of his saving mission for you and others?
- Jesus chose to not save himself, so he could save mankind. Pope Francis urges us to think of this event as personal – Jesus died for you – to save you from your sins. How does this make you feel?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.