

¡Viva Cristo Rey!

Long live Christ the King

By Fr. Gonzalo Meza¹



Father Miguel Agustín Pro on his execution

The Church closes the year on the last Sunday in Ordinary Time with the solemnity of Christ the King. In that way, the Church prefigures what will happen at the end of history when Christ comes back again to judge the living and the dead, a time when everything will be subject to him.

The cross is the place where we encounter Jesus. That is why in the solemnity of Christ the King, the Church presents the scene of the crucifixion. Jesus is a king who reigns from the cross. God does not manifest himself in amazing signs and wonders.

Archbishop José Gomez in his book “Man of brave heart” says that Jesus’ existence is the translation of power into humility, and into obedience of the will of the Father. St Thomas Aquinas said: “Jesus was born in a manger. He lived

without money. He died on the cross.” That is the example that he left us. The spirituality of the imitation of Christ is based upon this. Our faith has very little to do with power and riches, such as mansions and high ranks. Pope Francis said “His kingship is paradoxical: his throne is the cross; his crown is made of thorns; he has no sceptre, but a reed is put into his hand; he does not have luxurious clothing, but is stripped of his tunic; he wears no shiny rings on his fingers, but his hands are pierced with nails; he has no treasure, but is sold for thirty pieces of silver. Jesus’ reign is truly not of this world (cf. Jn 18:36); but for this reason, Saint Paul tells us in the Second Reading, we find redemption and forgiveness (cf. Col 1:13-14).” (Pope Francis, Homily, Nov. 20, 2016).

Our faith has everything to do with sacrifice and therefore with the cross. In our imitation of Christ, we will find his strength in our weakness. St Paul tells us again: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Co 12:9) His Divine Power is manifested in weakness, and humiliation. St Paul said, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Co 1:18)

The cross is the only key to understand God’s power and love for us. And we are called to imitate his example, to become imitators of Jesus Christ. The cross is essential to understand who we are. The cross is the sign of the mystery of a God who suffers human weakness to show that the “the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” (1 Co 1:25) The Gospel we proclaim and live is nothing other than the word of the cross.

We are called to imitate Jesus. And the servants are not above their Master. The disciples of Jesus throughout history have suffered. And this is true for all of us. One spiritual author said, “your Master died on the cross. Why do you want to be treated differently?”

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The Christians who better understood the message of the cross and the power that comes from it were the martyrs. They suffered and gave their lives to defend Jesus Christ. Between 1926 and 1929 Catholic Church was outlawed in Mexico by the Government. Thousands of people died and suffered persecution. They were called "Cristeros" because they defended Christ the King and Our Lady of Guadalupe, crying "Viva Cristo Rey". One of those Cristeros was Father Miguel A. Pro. He would minister to the people disguised as a mechanic or whatever costume he could find to bring the sacraments to the people at a time when Masses were forbidden. In the midst of the persecution he wrote, "I am amazed at the special aid of God, the very special graces he grants us in perils, and how his presence is now more intimately felt when discouragement comes to make our souls smaller." In his great sufferings Father Pro experienced the gift of fortitude and the strength promised to the disciples of Christ in their tribulations. Unfortunately, he was discovered, and was imprisoned. On the day of his execution he refused to be blindfolded. He stood, faced the firing squad, and with a crucifix in one hand and a rosary in the other, he held his arms outstretched in the form of a cross and in a loud, clear voice cried out, "With all my heart I forgive my enemies!" As the soldiers lifted their rifles, he exclaimed in a loud voice, "Viva Cristo Rey!" "Long live Christ the King!"

We are called to be the image of God, through a lifelong conversion and daily transformation. To do so, we are called to imitate Jesus, and therefore be open to experience his power in our sufferings because it is in our own crosses that we will encounter the Lord. It is in the cross where we will experience his presence and his power.

Many times, at the end of the civil year people make an examination of the year that is about to end. On the last week of the liturgical year we should take the opportunity to reflect about our faith, about our own crosses and therefore our relationship with God. I propose to you, one question to start your own examination of your relationship with God. Did you encounter the Lord in your crosses? Based on that encounter with the Lord on your cross, how was your relationship with God? Or, did you refuse your cross and therefore refuse to establish an encounter with Jesus?

To help us respond to this question, let us take a look at the Gospel of Luke chapter 23, where he presents the scene of the crucifixion. Jesus is crucified in the middle of two criminals. He is mocked by people and the soldiers. "Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? 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.'" (Lk 23:39–41)

One of the criminals who rebuked the other man told 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." (Lk 23:42–43) Tradition has called that criminal, Dismas the repentant thief. During his life Dismas did a lot of awful actions, and that is why he was condemned to the worst torture of the time, the cross. However, during the last moments of his life, he recognized Jesus as the Savior. This encounter between Dismas and Jesus happened at a very painful moment, when both of them were suffering on the cross. The encounter with Jesus changed the life of Dismas and his destiny forever. It led him to repentance. When Dismas asks Jesus for forgiveness, the Lord not only forgave his sins but he also promised to take him into Heaven. "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Lk 23:43) The encounter between Dismas and Jesus happened moments under a very painful situation, the torture of the cross.

But it happens that such instrument of torture became the instrument of salvation. Jesus made it possible.

Notice how different was the reaction of the other criminal, crucified to the left of Jesus. He did not stop complaining and mocking Jesus. Many people in our times take that road. A false road. When they face difficulties and challenges, they blame everybody for their hardships. And many times they even blame God. Little by little their hopelessness provoke the blindness of their souls, to the point that they are incapable of see their faults and sins. Their incapacity to recognize their sins shuts their faith down little by little. And at the end either their faith dies or in the best of the cases, their faith becomes fossilized.

On the other side, Dismas teaches us that we must see in the cross an opportunity to experience the power of God. Because it is in the cross, that we will discover the power and the beauty of a real encounter with Jesus. It is in the cross where God pours out his graces upon us to make us stronger. If we discover God in the cross, that encounter will lead us to repentance and a desire to repair for our past faults.