

Greetings to you! Today we are in the Last Sunday of Pentecost and we celebrate the festival of Christ the Lord. The theme for our meditation is, "The kingly glory of Jesus on the Cross." How do we understand Jesus as a king in all his glory while he was suffering the death of a criminal on the cross? It seems to be that on the one hand just the opposite of any kingly glory as Jesus was stripped naked and only had a crown of thorns in his head. Yet on the other side he was truly the king of glory. Two other men who were both criminals were also led out to be crucified. The three men face execution at a place called Golgotha in Aramaic which means skull. The place looked like a skull because of its protrusion from the earth. Jesus is placed between the two criminals one on his right and one on his left.

Luke records for us that the very first words uttered from the cross were, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." This prayer was meant for all those who were crucifying Jesus on the cross particularly the Jewish leadership and the Roman soldiers. Jesus is therefore interceding for his enemies portraying the very standards that he sets for his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount.

Forgiving others is not so easy and we generally tend to criticise others when they hurt us. Sometimes we also withhold forgiveness and keep an injury alive as a kind of drug. People can find an odd satisfaction in feeling victimised by life. They begin to need to suffer, to accumulate the evidence with which they can charge life in their continual arraignment of the universe for treating them so ill (Neville Ward). Jesus however sets the bar of forgiveness very high for us as his followers. We are to pray for those who hate us and to love our enemies. This act of forgiveness at a time of terrible suffering on the cross reveals the kingly glory of Jesus- as a king who is full of mercy and grace.

The second thing that we notice about Jesus on the cross is that his kingly glory is seen through the hope that he gives. As we see the two criminals who are hung beside him, one of them hurled insults at him saying, "Are you not the messiah? Save yourself and us!" but the other criminal rebuked him and said, "don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he turned to Jesus and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him. "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." Here is a man who is about to die who suddenly realises who Jesus is. The dying thief is shown as almost at the last minute seen something new about who is in the right and who is in the wrong in this obscure world. He realises that somewhere these tables would be turned and this defeated man of Nazareth would be seen to be one with true dignity and strength of life. He rides into death on the back of this new found hope and trust, "Jesus remember me when you come in your kingly power."

The dying man would have received this hope because he had seen Jesus forgiving others and also because he heard the crowd saying that he had saved others but could not save himself. So he begins to come to an understanding that Jesus is one who is a king who will forgive him and therefore pleads with him to remember him when he comes into his kingdom.

Peter Berger says that in the world human beings are constantly surrounded by death on all sides, the Christian continues to be a being who says "no!" to death- and through this "no" is brought to faith in another world, the reality of which would validate his hope as something other than illusion. The power to say "no" to death is the same power that enables people to say "no" to all the penultimate endings of various kinds that are imitations of death and in a breakdown, rehearsals of it, an ended love affair, disgrace, marriage breakdown, incapacitating illness and bereavement. All experiences that seem to say, "All is over for you. All that matters in your life is finished."

The kingly glory of Christ on the cross not only offers us forgiveness but hope for our future. No matter how terrible our circumstances may be, God will give us a new beginning if we trust him as Lord and king in our lives. May we truly gaze on his kingly glory on the cross and receive his forgiveness and hold on to the hope which he has given us in spite of all our circumstances.