Christ the King

On the last Sunday of each liturgical year, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, or Christ the King. Pope Pius XI instituted this feast in 1925 with his encyclical *Quas Primas* to respond to growing secularism and hostility towards the Church. It was after the great war and before the second one as communism was spreading, like a cancer, in the early twentieth century, in Mexico, Russia, China and many parts of Europe. Atheistic regimes threatened not just the Catholic Church and its faithful, but civilization itself. We would not be living in so secular a nation if there had no been such materialistic atheism last century – the bloodiest in human history. So Pope Pius XI's encyclical gave Catholics hope and—while governments around them crumbled—the assurance that Christ the King shall reign forever. Pope Pius also said that Christ "reign[s] 'in the hearts of men,' How is that so?

And how is Christ a King? We usually imagine a king surrounded by signs of power: a palace, a crown, soldiers, wealth, the ability to command. But on Calvary, Jesus appears to possess none of these things. He is mocked, condemned and nailed to the cross. Above him is a title meant to ridicule him: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Yet the words spoken in mockery proclaim a truth deeper than those who wrote them knew. Here, on the cross, Christ reveals what kind of King he is—and what kind of kingdom he brings. Jesus does not save the world by escaping its suffering or overpowering his enemies. He enters into human suffering and thus remains faithful to the Father. He meets violence without becoming violent, hatred without hating, and sin with mercy. The power of Christ is the power of a love that gives itself, forgives, and refuses to abandon us. The rulers of this world may command obedience for a time, but they cannot heal the human heart. They may seize territory, but they cannot seize our souls. Christ enters the very depths of our human condition and opens the human heart. The good thief sees something of this mystery. He is dying beside Jesus, in utter agony with no earthly future, yet inspired by grace, begs, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answers him with a promise of a kingdom and an eternal King.

In order to help us partake of this kingdom then, the Lord reminds us in the Gospel that now the works of mercy are obligatory for all Christians. Our very sanctification and salvation depends upon them. For that reason down through the centuries the Church has fostered these works or charity by means of movements, orders, apostolates, schools, hospitals, etc. What are these works? Seven for the body and seven for the soul. The seven corporal works of mercy are: Feed the hungry; Give drink to the thirsty; Clother the naked; Shelter the homeless; Visit the sick; Visit the prisoners; Bury the dead. The seven spiritual works of mercy are; Counsel the doubtful; Instruct the ignorant; Admonish the sinner; Comfort the sorrowful; Forgive injuries; Bear wrongs patiently; Pray for the living and the dead.

In order to prove such a claim that these works are part and parcel of our path to holiness we need to find people who walked the talk. Can we find real people who exemplified these works over the centuries?

Feed the hungry - St. Elizabeth of Hungary; Give drink to the thirsty - St. Camillus de Lellis; Clothe the naked - St Martin de Tours; Shelter the homeless - St Benedict; Visit the sick - St Teresa of Culcutta; Visit the prisoners - St Vincent de Paul; Bury the dead - St John Chrysostom; Counsel the doubtful - St Catherine of Siena; Instruct the ignorant - St John Bosco; Admonish the sinner - St John Vianney; Comfort the sorrowful - St Damian Molokai; Forgiving injuries - St Maria Goretti; Bearing wrongs patiently - St Monica; Praying for the living and the dead - St Faustina.

So we are called to practise these works, each day in some way, according to our vocation so as to manifest the fruits of Christian living, and thus, draw others to the Lord's kingdom and the presence of he who is the Lord of lords and King of the universe.