

Christ the King

Sunday, November 23, 2025

Introduction to the day

Jeremiah's promise of the execution of "justice and righteousness in the land" finds ironic fulfillment in the execution of Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. It appears utterly contradictory that a king should be crucified with a criminal. This victory appears for all the world as humiliating defeat. Yet through the gate of death Jesus opens the door to paradise.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

O God, our true life, to serve you is freedom, and to know you is unending joy. We worship you, we glorify you, we give thanks to you for your great glory. Abide with us, reign in us, and make this world into a fit habitation for your divine majesty, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 23:1-6

Today's reading builds on the common, ancient Near Eastern metaphor of the king as shepherd. Judah's unjust rulers have caused their people, their "flock," to be scattered. Nevertheless, God will raise up a new and righteous shepherd who will rule a restored Judah.

PSALM: Psalm 46

I will be exalted among the nations. (Ps. 46:10)

SECOND READING: Colossians 1:11-20

An early Christian hymn praises the mystery of the political, personal, and mystical Christ, the one who was present at creation and is eternally reigning with God.

GOSPEL: Luke 23:33-43

Amid scoffing and slander from those who sarcastically call him Messiah and king, Jesus reveals that to be Messiah and king is to give one's life for others. Here he uses his power to welcome a despised sinner to paradise but puts his own death into God's hands.

GOSPEL MESSAGE - The Servant King

Many congregations will sing a hymn this Sunday that declares, "Crown him the Lord of life, who triumphed o'er the grave and rose victorious in the strife for those he came to save" (ELW 855). This is an image of a conquering hero who fought Satan and won. Hail to the king! But that is not the king we are presented with in today's gospel reading. Jesus is a broken, rejected man hanging naked in public shame, dying for a capital offense, sandwiched between two criminals.

Many people struggle to think of Jesus as king because of the negative actions of historical kings. Kings have too often been men wielding power for their own gain, sitting on thrones upheld by patriarchy and wealth. Furthering this negative image are colonialism and the kings who issued decrees to ravage and control people in their native land. Neither is this the image of Christ the king in today's reading.

At Gonzaga University (Spokane, Washington), a focus on servant leadership is offered as a concentration in the master's program in organizational leadership. Its focuses are forgiveness and restorative justice, listening and discerning, community-building, foresight and strategy, and transformational thinking. Doesn't that sound a lot more like the leadership of Jesus?

Perhaps we are reminded of the hard parts of Jesus' journey to draw our attention to his purpose and the focus of his teachings. He wasn't a conqueror, and he didn't wield power for his own gain. He hung naked on the cross to be the ultimate servant leader. We claim Jesus as our king because of his servant leadership—his focus on forgiveness and restoration, building community, and thinking in transformational ways. Hail the servant king!

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Gathered with one voice, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

We pray for the church in the world, its leaders, and its mission to share the good news of healing and restoration. Inspire us to embody the beloved community in ways that faithfully witness to the Holy Spirit. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for the trembling mountains and glad streams of creation. Preserve and renew your coastlines, deep seas, forests, and grasslands. Guide all who tend flocks or care for creatures of all kinds. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for leaders and advocates in government, civic life, and public safety. Support equity across the globe, and heal division with accountability and truth. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for any who are hungry, living in poverty or desperation, weary in body or spirit, or sick especially Shirley Glickman, Donna L. Hoffman, Glenda Panke, Marilyn Schneider, Doug Sell, Debbie Thom and those in long term facilities and senior residences. Comfort all in need of your tender care. In this moment of silence, we name out loud or in the quiet of our hearts, those who need your healing touch. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for this part of the body of Christ gathered around word and sacrament. Bring us into authentic community where all ages are valued and experience God's faithfulness together. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We give thanks for all who have died in faith. May we remember them faithfully until we are gathered with you in the paradise you promise. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We offer these and all our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your grace and unyielding love; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (ELW p. 191)

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and  give you peace.

Amen.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Share the good news.

Thanks be to God.