Day by Day
Feasts, events, holidays, and thoughts for the daily preacher
Week of November 20, 2016
by Peter Scagnelli

Sunday, November 20, 2016
Solitude of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe
Thirty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
End of the Jubilee Year of Mercy
2 Samuel 5:1–3; Psalm 122; Colossians 1:12–20; Luke 23:35–43

Jubilee Year of Mercy reflection: Today, Luke, evangelist and by tradition artist, sends us forth from this Jubilee Year of Mercy with an unforgettable portrait of Christ the King. The setting for Jesus’ “royal portrait” is the cross. From this “throne,” the crucified “crown prince” welcomes by “executive pardon” the kingdom of mercy’s first citizen, a fellow criminal. The “Good Thief” requests neither deliverance nor salvation, nor even forgiveness: “Remember me when . . .” (Luke 23:42). “Today you will be with me,” King Jesus promises, “in paradise.” (23:43). Paradise, even for non-believers, is an image of creation contentedly in harmony with self, fellow creatures, and Creator. Today, we “good thieves” beg Jesus to remember us. We promise to remember that, although Jesus’ kingdom will be fulfilled only when Jesus returns, that kingdom begins today in the paradise that will flower from this Jubilee Year of Mercy. We disciples, having been embraced unconditionally and undeservedly by Jesus’ mercy, must now go forth to embrace all others, unconditionally, with that same unfailing mercy.

- Despite our revolution well over two hundred years ago, something about “monarchy” still stirs our imagination. Is it the splendor of ancient chivalry or the technology of futuristic sci-fi? Perhaps the fairytale romance of a modern prince’s engagement? Whatever it is, it cannot be anything practical, for in the real world, democracy “reigns” as the hallmark of human rights, the guarantor of individual freedom. The “divine right” of kings yielded long ago, often violently, to “the consent of the governed.” So why “crown” each liturgical year with the solemnity of Christ “the King”? Aren’t we disciples rather than “subjects”? Yes, but consider the origins of the feast. In 1925, as multiple forms of totalitarianism and secularism engulfed the world—Communism, Fascism, Nazism—Pope Pius XI knew that, whatever humanity’s longing for self-determination, these forces would compete for popular loyalty and, if need be, coerce it through brute power. By establishing this feast, Pius thundered Christianity’s “No!” In whatever nation Jesus’ disciples lived, under whatever political system, their highest loyalty and deepest love would belong to Christ alone. Two years later, when the Mexican Jesuit Father Pro (optional memorial Tuesday) faced the revolution’s firing squad, in subsequent decades when Christians challenging Nazism were herded to gas chambers and countless Eastern Catholics to the gallows, each one’s dying cry, “Long live Christ the King!” bore final witness to ultimate allegiance. Consider contemporary tyrannies: abortion and euthanasia, terrorism and drug wars, human trafficking, unbridled consumerism, so many more. Countering these false “monarchs” of today, the Catholic Church, along with most Protestant communities who share this liturgical observance and its appointed scriptures, proclaims the unique reign that claims each Christian’s singular loyalty, the universal kingship of Jesus Christ.

- To counter any political connotations, the Lectionary cycle’s three years portray different aspects of Christ’s kingship. In Year A, the Shepherd-King of Matthew’s final judgment rewards all who, caring for the least of their brothers and sisters, unknowingly did good to the King himself. In Year B, having told an uncomprehending Pilate, whose only frame of royal reference was Caesar, that his “kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), Jesus radically redefines “king” as a witness (the Greek word is martyr) to truth, and “everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice” (18:37).

- To clarify still further that, in calling Jesus king, Christians mean something entirely different from the secular world, Year C’s scriptures proclaim Christ’s kingship to be about forgiveness as well as universal sovereignty. Like David, Jesus our king is of “our bone and our flesh,” not only king, but shepherd (2 Samuel 5:1). Colossians proclaims Christ’s kingship the focal-point of unity: the in-gathering of all people within the Church, his Body, the reconciliation of all creation. Not accomplished painlessly: Christ makes “peace by the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). But ultimately assured: “In him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (1:19). Finally, the Gospel unveils Luke’s “formal portrait” of “King Jesus.” “Enthroned” upon the cross, the dying Jesus welcomes into his kingdom its first citizen; and typical of Luke, who has repeatedly shown the outsiders welcomed in, the lost found, the strayed carried home, and the estranged welcomed back, this recipient of Jesus’ “executive pardon” is an outcast, one of Jesus’ fellow convicted criminals—and imagine how egregious the crime that merited so horrendous an execution. Moreover, like the leper who sought healing but received even more, salvation; like the blind man who wanted sight but received even more, the insight of faith; hear the Good News Jesus proclaims to this “Good Thief.” The Thief does not request an immediate tangible gift, like deliverance from his present suffering. Nor a spiritual gift here and now, like forgiveness. Nor even the future benefit of salvation. His request is eloquently simple, poignantly vague: he asks Jesus only, “Remember me when . . .” (Luke 23:42). Equally eloquent and simple, but wondrously precise is Jesus’ response. No vague promise regarding a future kingdom not yet come but, as to the shepherds at Bethlehem about the messianic Good News, as to the worshipers in Nazareth’s synagogue about the fulfillment of Isaiah’s messianic prophecy, as to Zaccheus the tax-collector about his unmerited share in messianic salvation, Jesus’ promise is for Today. “Today you will be with me” And where? “In Paradise!” (23:43): that word so evocative, even to non-believers, of peace and plenty, reconciliation and rejuvenation, consolation and contentment, all creation in harmony with itself, its fellow creatures, and its Creator! Jesus declares that, for the disciple who confesses, then forgives others; is reconciled to God, then reconciles with others; gives thanks, then gives of self; for these salvation is not deferred until the kingdom finally come, but begins Today in the Paradise that flowers even on this weary earth, wherever disciples who, unmerited, have themselves been loved by God and themselves sow seeds of self-sacrificing love. This gloriously compassionate conclusion fittingly crowns this Lectionary year whose Gospel of Luke opened with the humble Virgin magnifying God who in every generation “casts down the mighty from their thrones and raises up the lowly” (Luke 1:52) and invites us to let a similar compassion mark our living and crown our dying.

Monday, November 21, 2016
Memorial of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Thirty-fourth or Last Week in Ordinary Time
Revelation 14:1–3, 4b–5; Psalm 24; Luke 21:1–4
Suggested observance: three days of fasting before Thanksgiving with preparation of food baskets for the needy

- This liturgical year’s final week opens with Revelation’s vision of final glory. In “Bible code,” 144,000 comes from Israel’s 12 tribes multiplied by the Lamb’s 12 apostles with three zeros signifying infinite salvation.

- Seeing wealth and poverty side by side, Jesus praises a widow whose small coins equal “more than all the rest, her whole livelihood” (Luke 21:3–4). For Luke, she is a living image of Jesus, about to offer his “all” in his passion. Advent, just around the corner, bids us give our own “widow’s mite” toward the world’s preparation for
Christ’s glorious coming. In time of economic struggle, our Christmas gift-giving should balance wants and needs (our own and others’), viewing styles and expenditures in evangelical perspective, including in Christmas planning practical care for today’s “widows,” society’s most vulnerable.

- Today’s memorial of an incident in the apocryphal “Gospel of James,” signifies Our Lady’s complete and perpetual dedication as virginal “handmaid of the Lord.”

Tuesday, November 22, 2016
Memorial of Saint Cecilia, Virgin and Martyr (3rd century)
Revelation 14:14–19; Psalm 96; Luke 21:5–11
- As we prepare to give thanks for our earthly harvest with signs of winter closing in, Revelation warns of God’s coming harvest: life for the just but also “grapes of wrath.”
- According to tradition, today’s patron saint of music, Cecilia, sang to the Lord even as she went forth to martyrdom.

Wednesday, November 23, 2016
Weekday
Optional Memorial of Saint Clement I, Pope and Martyr (died 97?)
Optional Memorial of Saint Columban, Abbot (543–615)
Optional Memorial of Blessed Miguel Augustin Pro, Priest and Martyr (1891–1927)
Revelation 15:1–4; Psalm 98; Luke 21:12–19
- God’s fury is transformed into a canticle of lasting glory, sung by those whose seeming defeat has been reversed.
- Jesus warns that disciples will suffer at the hands of those with whom they were most intimately related; but, like Revelation, he sets those trials in the context of ultimate victory. Moreover, he promises disciples in every age the gifts of eloquent defense, irresistible wisdom, and most of all, God’s abiding care.
- Columba’s missionary-monastic life reminds us that many immigrants to America owed their spiritual and intellectual growth to Benedictine men and women serving among them. From Pope Clement in first century Rome, to Father Pro in twentieth century Mexico, a salutary reminder: the cost of discipleship, negligible for us, has demanded of many the ultimate sacrifice.

Thursday, November 24, 2016
Memorial of Saint Andrew Dung-Lac, Priest (1795–1839) and Companions, Martyrs (1820 through 1862)
Thanksgiving Day: Mass “In Thanksgiving to God”
readings of the day or from Lectionary for Ritual Masses (vol. IV), nos. 943–947, especially Sirach 50:22–24; Ps 145; 1 Corinthians 1:3–9; Luke 17:11–19
- The United States Ordo suggests Sirach, whose wisdom asserts that Thanksgiving begins at home; we humans progress from what is near at hand to a wider vision. From the time we are being formed in our mother’s womb, God’s providential love surrounds us. Reflecting on such divine personal care should prompt us to look at the wider world and give thanks for blessings above and beyond ourselves and to assume responsibility for ensuring others a share in God’s generously lavished gifts. Paul counsels that, while giving thanks for material blessings, we dare not forget the intangible, spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 1:3, 5, 7). Luke’s story of the ten lepers (heard already on the Twenty-eighth Sunday and Wednesday of the Thirty-second Week) notes that all ten received healing but only one salvation, the one who returned in thanksgiving.
- But the weekday Lectionary readings are also appropriate. Revelation begins with the destruction of “Babylon,” a “super-power” whose industry and commerce, arts, and even human relationships are all swept away because of moral decadence and spiritual decay.
- His vision of the end expands to include cosmic cataclysms, worldwide turmoil, widespread panic. In the face of this, Jesus invites us to courage and confidence. Whatever befalls the wider world—or us—disciples need not cower: “Stand erect, raise your heads, your redemption is at hand” (Luke 21:28).

Friday, November 25, 2016
Weekday
Optional Memorial of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Virgin and Martyr (died 310?)
Revelation 20:1–4, 11 — 21:2; Psalm 84; Luke 21:29–33
- If there is no Mass tomorrow morning, join today’s and tomorrow’s readings as the Lectionary permits, so that the community hears Revelation’s culmination and Jesus’ final “temple sermon.”
- Violent turmoil accompanying the endtime’s mystical harvest culminates in new heaven, new earth, a new Jerusalem “prepared as bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2). The community longs to be that Bride! Jesus challenges us to act on that longing, alert to signals of the kingdom’s nearness, anchored in his assurance that, whatever else passes away, his word endures.
- Catherine is often pictured with the spiked wheel on which she was tortured. Legendary debater and converter of pagan philosophers, she was invoked by medieval Christians as patron of students, lawyers, and even young women searching for suitable husbands!

Saturday, November 26, 2016
Weekday
Optional Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- Genesis began in a paradise garden, with forbidden fruit, our first parents hiding from God’s wrath. Revelation ends in a shining city, life’s tree producing healing fruit all year. Far from hiding, an eager community of disciples calls out: Come quickly, the responsoir psalm refrain preserving the original Aramaic, begging the Lord, in the language he spoke on earth: Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!
- Drowsy disciples nearly missed the Transfiguration and were unable to watch even one hour in Gethsemane. So Jesus warns us to be vigilant and prayful, neither thoughtlessly carefree, nor paralyzed by anxiety. This Advent eve, what distractions and anxieties sap our strength, numb our spirits, deaden our anticipation of Christ’s coming?
- End the liturgical year by celebrating the memorial of the woman whose presence fills the Church’s Advent-Christmas Season: Mass 46, “Mary, Gate of Heaven” (Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary).

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