

**“If you fear the Lord your God all the days of your life
and if you keep all His laws and commandments... you will have long life.”**

Dt 6:2

Last Sunday we began to consider the feast of Christ the King which falls at the end of the Church's year at the end of November. We saw how, originally, the feast was on the last Sunday of October so that it fell immediately before All Saints Day and All Souls Day on 1st and 2nd of November respectively. We saw how, as Catholics, Christ is King of our hearts, no mere sentimental phrase but a recognition that Christ rules over our acts of the will, our behaviour, our growth in holiness.

Having now observed All Saints Day and All Souls Day, we can see more easily what it means in practice that Christ should be King of our hearts.

On Friday we rejoiced with the whole court of heaven as we honoured Our Blessed Lady as Queen and delighted in the glory of all the saints. By ‘all the saints, we do not, of course, mean only those saints whose names we know, the famous saints who have feast days throughout the year, St Joseph, St Pancras, St Thérèse of Lisieux, and so forth. Rather, we include all those who have attained to salvation and now enjoy the Beatific Vision – those who now see God face to face – in heaven (1 Cor 13:12): those holy ones who have journeyed through this vale of tears, who have fought the good fight (2 Tim 4:7), who have overcome trials and tribulations and have washed their robes clean in the Blood of the Lamb (Apoc. 7:14), and who are become transformed into a perfect likeness to Christ (1 Jn 3:2). They may well include some of our own ancestors, members of our own family or friendship group, those who have gone before us and now rest in the sleep of peace.

All those who are in heaven now are those who have, during the course of their lives here on earth, surrendered their hearts to the reign of Our Lord Jesus Christ and called upon Him to govern their thoughts, their words, and their deeds, as we say each day in our morning offering; those who have, day by day, sought to follow the path laid out for them by the King of Love on Calvary; those who have lived lives of virtue, loving God with all their hearts, and minds, and strength, loving their neighbours as themselves, and making sacrifices to Almighty God and on behalf of their neighbours day by day, week by week, month by month, as the years have gone by. They are the ones who have taken up the challenge of their King when He said to them, ‘If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me’ (Mt 16:24). They have shunned the road to destruction, which is broad, and which would have been so much easier to follow, and have passed through the narrow gate instead (Mt 7:13).

Likewise the Holy Souls in Purgatory who, having followed the narrow path during this life, nonetheless still have outstanding debts to pay for sins committed here, and which acts of penance must, therefore, be undergone after death. You and I will suffer the pains of Purgatory if, during this life, we have sinned more than we have suffered. On the other hand, if we suffer in this life more than we sin – and if we offer up that suffering to God as penance for our wrongdoing – then we shall have completed the perfecting process in this life and go straight to heaven.

I’m afraid most of us probably *will* go to Purgatory, and probably *will* have to undergo the perfecting process for some time after we have departed this life. We will become dependent on the prayers of the saints in heaven – who have already made it – as well as on the prayers of those we leave behind, our friends and family members who offer up Masses, and penances, and indulgenced prayers on our behalf. Once we are in Purgatory

we shall no longer be able to pray for ourselves or work towards the relief of our own suffering, so we need the help of those still on earth.

As Catholics, we are obligated to pray for the Holy Souls in Purgatory, in the month of November and indeed throughout the year. The Holy Souls in Purgatory are on the cusp of entering fully into the kingdom of heaven but they need our help in the final stages of their pilgrim journey of hope. So, please, I beg you, do not neglect those who are certainly praying for you but who can no longer pray for themselves.

The Kingdom of God is made up of three tiers: the Church triumphant in heaven; the Church suffering in Purgatory; and the Church militant on earth whose members in this life are still battling against the temptations and snares of the devil, and trying to navigate our way across the stormy seas of this life. That's you and me!

So let us pray for one another that we, as Moses commanded, might live according to the laws of Christ's kingdom in this life so that we might, one day, rejoice with Him forever in the next.