

## Readings 2 Sm 5:1-3; Col 1:12-20; Lk 23:35-43

*The criminal and the seminarian The crucified King wants to forgive us as he forgave the good thief on the first Good Friday.*

The Catholic Digest carries a regular feature called "The Open Door." It usually contains two or three stories sent in by readers. These stories describe either how the readers became a Catholic or how they returned to the Catholic Church after having been away from it for a while.

One story was especially moving. It was about a young person who grew up in a Catholic family, was once quite active in the Church, and entered a seminary to study for the ministry. Then came the turmoil of the Vietnam years. During this time three students at an Ohio college were killed during campus protests against the war. Race riots tore apart our cities. National leaders were assassinated. Suddenly everything became unglued. The young man left the seminary, joined the antiwar movement, left the Church, and began ridiculing the faith he once embraced. His family was shocked by his change in attitude. And when his behavior became more and more hostile to religion, they all but gave up hope. Then came Holy Week and Good Friday of 1970. The young man, then twenty-two years old, was driving past a Catholic church. He recognized the name of a priest on the sign in front of the church. It was a priest he had once respected very much. Something prompted him to stop his car and go inside the church. As he walked through the door, the Good Friday "Adoration of the Cross" was beginning. He sat down in the very last pew. He watched people file up to reverence the cross while the choir sang **"Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?"** Then something remarkable happened. The young man writes—and I quote him exactly: "Something inside me snapped and I began to cry. Overcome with emotion, I remembered the peace I had felt years ago in church.

The simple faith I was witnessing now seemed more meaningful than what I had been professing. I got out of my seat and went down to kiss the Cross. The priest recognized me, came over, and hugged me." "On that day," the young man said, "I became a born-again Catholic." He concluded with this observation: "Why I stopped in the church that day, I still don't know, but I know that I am happy with the results."

I like that story because it fits so beautifully with the readings for today's feast of Christ the King. For the **gospel reading describes another angry, irreligious young**

**man whose life was turned around completely on the first Good Friday, two thousand years ago.** And what turned that young person's life around was the same thing that turned around the life of the young seminarian in the story.

It was the crucifixion of Christ. It was the crucifixion of Christ the King. And what the crucified Christ said to the young criminal on the cross, he also said to the young seminarian: "I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me." There could hardly be a more appropriate reading with which to end the liturgical year.

It summarizes why Jesus came into the world. It was to forgive sinners, like the young criminal— and like the young seminarian. And this brings us to the practical application of all of this to our own personal lives. It is this: What Jesus did for the young criminal and the young seminarian; he wants to do for us, also. He wants to forgive our sins, no matter how great they are or how long-standing they may be. He wants to say to us what he said to the young criminal and the young seminarian: "I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me." This is the good news contained in today's Scripture readings.

This is the good news that brings us together to celebrate the feast of Christ the King. It is the good news that Jesus wants to enter our lives and do for us what he did for the criminal and the seminarian. St. Paul expresses that good news this way in today's second reading: [God] rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son, by whom we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven.

**"Let's close with a prayer:** Lord Jesus, it's not enough for us to look at you carrying your cross and to proclaim you to be our king. It's not enough for us to bow our heads and call you Lord of Lords. It's not enough for us to praise you on this your feast day. We must pick up our own cross and follow you. We must follow you every day of our lives. We must follow even to the cross itself, if that be your will. And if we do, you will say to us before we die what you said to the good thief before he died: "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."