



ACTA
LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, UNIVERSAL KING

Last Sunday in Ordinary Time
Year C
Year of Luke

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READINGS

A reading from the second book of Samuel 5:13

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 122:1-5. R/. cf. v.2

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Colossians
1:12-20

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke 23:35-43

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God is not a king. Jesus is not a king. There are no royal thrones in heaven, no kingly crowns, in fact, no royal regalia of

any kind. There are no golden gates admitting humanity to enter a royal presence within.

What we have is a collection of royal metaphors that help us to understand the nature of God. But the royal images employed throughout the whole of the Bible are meant to illustrate that God and Jesus are totally different. Ancient peoples were governed by kings (sometimes queens—remember the Queen of Sheba and Cleopatra). It no surprise that they might imagines that their gods were kings but much more powerful than their earthy versions. It is no surprise that the words king, kings, kingdom, and the like, occur 2954 times. But royal language used of God in the Bible is always a criticism of those who wielded power on earth. Consider a few lines for the psalms:

*The LORD is king forever and ever;
the nations perish from his land.
O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted;
you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear
to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.*

Psalm 10:16-17

Notice that, unlike earthly kings who are here today and gone tomorrow, the LORD God is king forever and ever. Nations come and go but God's rule is everlasting. But the startling contrast between the kings who strut upon the world's stage and the God who reigns forever is not an iron hand. The ear of God is listening and,

*... will hear the desire of the afflicted,
... will strengthen their heart,
... will do justice to the fatherless,
... will do justice to the oppressed.*

To call God a king was to hold up to earthly kings a profound criticism of their constant failure. When our ancestors in faith named God a king, it was not in imitation of earthly kings. It was always a profound criticism of those who ruled the Israel and, indeed, of all who ruled the world:

*The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.
May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace.*

Psalm 29:10-11

Whenever the LORD is dressed in kingly robes, God's power is always total and everlasting. God's strength is always empowering people to be as God designed them to be. Above all God's blessings are always blessings to shower upon the earth God's greatest gift: *peace, shalom*.

Numbers aren't everything. But it is impressive that the word "king" occurs 315 times in the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The total number of occurrences in all the prophets is 500.¹

The figures for the New Testament are equally startling. The word "king" occurs 54 times in our four Gospels and a total of 86 in the whole of the New Testament. But it is the number of times "kingdom" and "kingdoms" turn up in the New Testament that has greatest claim on our attention.

On the First Sunday of Advent we begin the Year of Matthew when that Gospel provides readings throughout the year. Matthew's Gospel is often summarised in the phrase *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. So the "kingly" words in the Gospel are especially important. The words "king" occurs 19 times in Matthew's text. But the word "kingdom" occurs 56 times in Matthew, 20 times in Mark, and 45 times in Luke, yet only 3

¹ This number does not include the plural *kings*, or *kingdom* or *kingdoms*, or *kingship*.

times in John and all in one sentence (John 18:36). Obviously, “the kingdom” is a major concern of the first three Gospels. In the whole of the New Testament the word “kingdom” occurs 159 times, and you will note the Gospels have 127 of these. Clearly, “kingdom” is at the very heart of Gospel teaching and in the Year of Matthew must be a major concern.

Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel has much to say about God’s kingship and his words are a sure guide to what it means to call God, and therefore Jesus, a king. Ezekiel’s God dethrones earthly kings and takes responsibility for the people’s welfare:

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the LORD God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.

Ezekiel 34:1-4

God tells Ezekiel what has happened to the people as a result of the failure of kings to care for them:

So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

Ezekiel 34:5-6

God's solution is to take back the remit given to these kings who, rather than committing themselves to the welfare of the people, impoverished them by their exploitation:

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As I live, declares the LORD God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the LORD God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

Ezekiel 34:7-10

In a beautiful paragraph God spells out his shepherding policy and outlines the care that will be lavished on the people:

For thus says the LORD God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of

Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the LORD God.

Ezekiel 34: 11-15

Meditate for a moment on what God's shepherding will embrace:

I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy.

Ezekiel 34:16

The final phrase of the paragraph sums up what God intends:

I will feed them in justice.

Ezekiel 34:16

God's justice, that is, the justice that is uniquely God's, will determine the quality of divine care of God's people. God's justice is not the business of the Old Bailey. It is the justice that emerges from one who is Love, and whose love is steadfast and endures forever. How apt is this criticism of the rulers of our world, a paragraph written over 2,500 years ago:

As for you, my flock, thus says the LORD God: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

Ezekiel 34:17-19

And how wonderful is this as a promise of what God will give to the world in sending his Son to be the Good Shepherd of a new world order:

I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

Ezekiel 34:22-24

Kings and kingdoms

The words “king”, “kings”, “kingly”, and “kingdom” occur 4,218 times in our Bible. Mostly they have to do with rulers who failed to exercise proper stewardship of the people entrusted to their care. The miserable record of the kings of Israel, from David down to Jehoiachin, the last of them, who died in exile in Babylon, is plain to see. The prophets were the voice of protest, a voice mainly ignored. In fact, the one prophet whose counsel was listened to was the seamstress Huldah who gave wise advice to King Josiah (II Kings 22:1-20).

While the image of shepherd was commonly used in the Middle East as a measure of what a king should be, it was an image more honoured in the breach than in the observance. That is why in St John’s Gospel Jesus insists that he is the *Good Shepherd*. That is why in the same Gospel, when Pilate asks,

Are you the King of the Jews?

John 18:33

Jesus twice insists that,

My kingdom is not of this world.

John 18:36

His kingdom is based on truth, the kind of truth that sets people free (John 8:33). But of course the powers of this world are not interested in that commodity. Pilate can speak for them all:

What is truth?

John 18:38

The saddest sentence in John's Gospel is this:

We have no king but Caesar.

John 18:15

A reading from the second book of Samuel

5:13

... all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the LORD said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.' " So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel.

The word of the LORD.

David is presented in the Bible as a murderer, a cheat, a traitor, a totally useless parent, an adulterer, and a cunning, devious twister. There are some redeeming features: he prays, he repents, and he appears to have written some beautiful psalms in praise of God. In bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem he displays some awareness of the Presence of God

(and a great deal of political nous). To be sure, in Jewish history David is the idealised leader who established a viable kingdom, set Jerusalem as its capital city, and confirmed the identity of his people among the people of the Middle East. As the Gospels make clear, Christians regard David the King as the most important ancestor of Jesus of Nazareth. He is mentioned more times in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus than Jesus himself (see Matthew 1:1-17). But this is not to say that Jesus reflects many of the characteristics of that very flawed human being.

In the ancient—and not so ancient—world, kings wielded absolute power. Their authority was even deemed divine by popes as well as kings. Indeed, the first power to demand to be regarded as “LORD and God” was Domitian, the Emperor of Rome, a very diligent persecutor of Christians (though both these “facts” are seriously contested by reputable historians).

What today’s first reading is intended to convey is that the hopes invested in David the King were reinvested in Jesus of Nazareth. Our hopes are invited to be settled on new and broader shoulders.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 122:1-5. R/. cf. v.2

R/. *I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”*

*I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD*

*Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!*

R/.

*Jerusalem— built as a city
that is bound firmly together,
to which the tribes go up,*

the tribes of the LORD.

R/.

*It was decreed for Israel
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.*

*R/. I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”*

Today’s Responsorial Psalm is clearly the hymn of a pilgrim going up to the Temple in Jerusalem, going into the Presence of the LORD. The excitement rises as the pilgrim enters the gates of the city.

The city was protected by its walls and the tribes of Israel could be sure that they were safe within. They are, after all, not simply the tribes of Israel; they are on that account the tribes of YHWH, the people of the LORD God.

It is at the LORD’S command that pilgrimage be made to go to praise YHWH. The LORD is enthroned in the Temple (in the poet’s imagination) and in Jerusalem the king, descended from David, dwells next door to the God he must serve in God’s name.

It is likely that the psalm has King Josiah in mind. He was the young king who, beginning in 621 B.C., repaired the crumbling Temple and instituted a reform programme tantamount to a national retreat, urging people to return to the faith of their fathers. Josiah was almost the only king who took God seriously. He had the guidance in his renovation of both Temple and people, of a prophet named Huldah, a seamstress in the royal household. Read II Kings 22:1-20 where Huldah’s story is told and II Kings 23:1-27 for Josiah’s reform programme.

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Colossians

1:12-20

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

*He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation.*

*For by him all things were created,
in heaven and on earth,
visible and invisible,*

*whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—
all things were created through him and for him.*

*And he is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.*

And he is the head of the body, the church.

*He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
that in everything he might be preeminent.*

*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
and through him to reconcile to himself all things,
whether on earth or in heaven,
making peace
by the blood of his cross.*

The word of the LORD.

The letter addressed to Christians in the city of Colossae, a city in the middle of Asia Minor, opens as follows:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ at Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

However the majority of scholars are convinced that St Paul did not write the letter to the communities of Christians in Colossae. In the early years of the Christian project, before the New Testament reached its present content, there was much discussion to what writings should be included in the Church's most precious library of books. Modern discussion about authorship follows the pattern of earlier times. Vocabulary is examined for similarities and dissimilarities. Questions of style raise heated if not always informative discussions. Theological tendencies are more easily identified but, again, not everyone agrees on what is definitely Pauline or definitely not. Questions of ethical behaviour, church organisation, and questions concerning eschatology always feature in discussions.

Why do such discussions matter? They matter because it is important to trace, if possible, developments in the thinking of the earliest Christian communities, differences of community organisation, and different expressions of the sacramental life that bound believers together.

In the case of Colossians, the first thing scholars point out is that there are a number of words in this letter that do not appear in undisputed letters of St Paul (such as Romans, I Corinthians, Galatians, or Philippians). All told, there are 87 words in Colossians not found in the undisputed letters just mentioned. But the genuine letter to Philippian Christians is equally rich in vocabulary not found in undisputed letters. In other words, vocabulary oddities do not prove much.

In matters of style, it is true that Colossians has plenty of very long sentences, not always obvious in English translations. For example, the opening paragraph of the original Greek, verses 3-8, is one long sentence:

Always, when we pray for you, we thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in the heavens, of which you have before heard in the word of truth of the gospel that has come to you, and likewise in the whole world bearing fruit and growing, as among you from the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned from Epaphras our beloved fellow slave who is a trustworthy minister of Christ on your behalf and who has told us of your love in the Spirit.²
Colossians 1:3-8

The ESV breaks this down into three sentences. The RNJB offers five sentences.

While anyone might have an occasional long sentence, such sentences are a feature of Colossians. This feature does not prove that Paul did not write this letter, but the extended elegance of the style is remarkable.

In matters of the image of Christ Jesus, the letter emphasises the cosmic aspect of Christ as in today's reading:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:15-17

It is noticeable that St Paul addresses the churches, that is, the little house-churches that are the foundation stones of our faith. Colossians emphasises that Jesus is “the head of the body, the church” but clearly the writer means the Church, for this Christ is -

² This is my translation.

... the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Colossians 1:18-20

Only in Colossians and Ephesians do we learn that the Church is the Body of Christ and Christ is its head.

In matter of eschatology, Colossians is unique in claiming that we have risen with Christ and already live in the kingdom of God's beloved Son. Already in this life the baptised are risen with the Lord and destined for glory:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Colossians 3:1-4

While these matters may not trouble Christians struggling to live a life of faith in an increasingly godless society, they are important for they show that the churches did not come into the world with teaching and organisational structure set in stone. Christians learned to adopt and adapt, to make whatever provisions were necessary to enable the churches effectively to proclaim the gospel of God to the world.

A Hymn

For the most part the second reading today is a hymn with an introduction. There is much in the letter to Colossian Christians that sounds like St Luke, and a few scholars have suggested that he wrote it. Be that as it may, it is important to be precise in quoting the exact sentence of introduction. The text in the Lectionary presents 1:12 as a new sentence but it is in fact an explanatory qualification to the main thrust of the sentence. However, the introductory sentence is one of those very long sentences that are a feature of this letter. Nevertheless it is necessary to be aware of the full introduction to the hymn in order to understand its amazing account of who Jesus is and to what purpose God sent “his beloved Son” (1:13) to “make peace by the blood of his cross” (1:20). This is the long introductory sentence:

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:9-14

Epaphras, presented as a faithful co-worker with Paul, was responsible for bringing the gospel of God to the city of Colossae and for its continued growth. The success of the Christian message in that city has been reported to St Paul and this letter purports to be a response written by the great

apostle who has “heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have of all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven” (1:3-4). Notice what is written here: **faith, hope, and love**—the three fundamentals of Christian life. The whole letter needs to be read as an affirmation of the very basis of our unity with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so—the opening words of the long introductory paragraph informs readers and hearers that all that follows flows from the report of the splendour of the faith that is alive in the hearts of all Christians in Colossae:

***And so**, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, in every strength may you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, in all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light, for he has delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Colossians 1:9-14³

It is clear that the hymn is intended to be a glorious thanksgiving explosion of wonder and joy at all God the Father has done in “transferring us from darkness into the “the kingdom of his beloved Son”, that is, bringing everyone into where Jesus is. Those who have embraced Christian faith are redeemed from the darkness to “the hope laid up for you in heaven”. Christians are in a world where sins are forgiven and

³ I have altered the ESV translation slightly in order to stress that the paragraph is one continuous sentence, piling blessing upon blessing.

sinner “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, everyday increasing in the knowledge of God”.

The hymn is a joyous outburst of wonder, spelling out not only what God has done in Jesus for all Christians. It is a celebration of the transformation of creation. For what God has done in Jesus is “to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven”. Astonishingly—for we are still in the early days of Christian reflection, even if Colossians was written near the end of the first century of faith—in Jesus “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”. This “fullness”, this “totality” of God is directed to the sole purpose of God’s love: “to reconcile to himself *all* things”.

Whenever Colossians was written, by whomsoever it was written, for whatever purposes it came to be written, it remains one of the most profound outpouring of wonder and joy, of faith, hope, and love, to give voice to the depth of Christian faith. Its first child was the Letter to Ephesians that attempts to expand on the blessings that come to us in a short letter to Christians who lived in the middle of Turkey.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

23:35-43

And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving

*the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”
And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”
And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in
Paradise”.*

The Gospel of the LORD.

Readers and hearers of the Gospels must be especially alert when they are invited to listen to the accounts of the crucifixion and death of Jesus as told in our four Gospels. For sharp ears will notice that each of the four accounts differ in many ways from each other. The differences may be dramatically exposed by two sentences. In the Gospels of Mark (15:34) and Matthew (27:46) the dying Jesus utters a cry:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

In contrast, in Luke Gospel the dying Jesus, calling out in a loud voice, said,

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

This is just one instance of a marked feature of Luke’s account of the suffering and death of Jesus. Today’s Gospel reading has many features peculiar to Luke and awareness of these helps to highlight what he seeks to teach to those readers and hearers who were first to listen to his story. It is imperative to be aware of the words.

People

The first peculiarity of the section of Luke’s Gospel presented to us today is that it begins with the word “people”. In all of our four Gospels there are frequent references to “the crowd” or “the crowds”. Mark mentions them 34 times, Matthew 45

times, and Luke 33 times. But what is peculiar about Luke is that he never has crowds standing around the cross witnessing the death of Jesus. For Luke it is the people who stood by watching. This people (λαός, *laos*, - from which we get the word “laity”) gathered around the cross never jeer at the dying man and never hurl insults. They stood by watching.

Watching

There is a simple sentence: *And the people stood watching*. Some English translations add “Jesus”. But that is to miss the impact of that simple verb in the context. When Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, the chief priests and the scribes stood by. But not in silence. They were “vehemently accusing him”. So at the foot of the cross: “But the rulers scoffed at him”, and “the soldiers mocked him”. The three verbs that Luke uses in the tirade of derision are “sneering” (verse 35), “mocking” (verse 36), and “blaspheming”. There is, as it were, an ascending order of contempt. It is instructive to note that the pinnacle of contempt, the blaspheming, is done by “one of the criminals”—and the verb here is in the imperfect tense, meaning that he kept up a barrage of blasphemous abuse. But this torrent of vilification ends in an act of mercy and forgiveness. As in life, so in death, Jesus is merciful. He does not save himself; he saves the criminal who begs to be remembered. Jesus is big on remembering.

All this the people witnessed in their watching. Listen to what they will have heard:

From the rulers:

*He saved others;
let him save himself;
the Christ of God;*

his Chosen One.

Recall:

*The Son of Man has come to seek
and to save the lost.* Luke 19:10

Recall:

*This is my Son,
My Chosen One;
Listen to him!*

Recall:

*But who do you say that I am?
And Peter answered,
“The Christ of God”.* Luke 9:20

From soldiers:

King of the Jews.

Recall:

*And the LORD God will give to him the throne of his father David,
and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom
there will be no end.*

Luke 1:32-33

From the criminal:

*Are you not the Christ?
Save yourself!
And Us!*

Recall:

*If anyone would come after me,
let him deny himself*

*and take up his cross daily
and follow me.*

*For whoever would save his life will lose it,
but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.*

Luke 9:23-24

From the sneering, mocking, and blaspheming, those who are standing watching, and those readers and hearers who first listened to Luke's words, learn the true identity of the man on the cross in the middle of the two criminals (verse 33: "one on his right and one of his left"). With the greatest of irony, Luke makes the enemies proclaim who Jesus is!

The people standing watching and "the women who had followed him from Galilee standing at a distance watching these things" (Luke 23:49) will have a future in the community on whom the Holy Spirit will come to rest.

Readers and hearers

Luke's readers and hearers, then and now, listen with sadness and pain. But what Luke provides in the telling of this crucifixion story is a revelation of who Jesus is, to what purpose God has committed this man to our world, and to what destiny the man on the cross will lead humanity. Perhaps the best commentary on what happened on the black Friday comes from St Paul, the first to reveal the truth of the matter:

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

I Corinthians 1:22-25

The irony of the whole story of the crucifixion is that, as John's Gospel reveals, what happened at Calvary was a coronation, for it is in the watching there that we will see,

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, UNIVERSAL KING.

Joseph O'Hanlon
A Note to Translators

It is the fashion in modern English translations of the Bible to offer "Truly, I say to you ..." rather than "Amen, I say to you ...".⁴ May I suggest that translators retain the *Amen* version?

Amen is a Hebrew word and the earliest translations of the Hebrew Bible into Greek retained *Amen*, as, for example, in today's Gospel: Ἀμήν σοι λέγω, *Amen I say to you*. St Jerome's fourth/fifth century A.D. Latin translation (still the official Bible of the Latin Catholic Church), retains the Hebrew: *Amen, dico tibi*.

The point is that, as used in both the Hebrew Bible and in the Christian New Testament, *Amen* has divine implications. There is a very solemn moment recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy. Just as the people of Israel are about to cross the Jordan River into the land God promised would be their home, the whole people are assembled by Moses and the elders of the people. They are commanded to build an altar as soon as they set foot for the first time in the land flowing with milk and honey. They are bidden to offer a peace-offering sacrifice, that is, a sacrifice that proclaims *shalom* between God and God's people on earth. It is a very solemn occasion:

⁴ Thus the RSV, NRSV, NASB, REB. The popular French edition of the New Testament, *Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible* has *en vérité*. The *Jerusalem Bible* has a very strange offering: *Indeed, I promise you ...*. Jesus is not promising anything. He is stating a divine ordinance. The NJB removes that embarrassment with *In truth I tell you*. Thankfully the RNJB gets it right: *Amen I say to you ...*

*Now Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying,
“Keep the whole commandment that I command you today.*

Deuteronomy 27:1

The whole people are commanded a second time to listen:

Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel, “Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of the LORD your God. You shall therefore obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping his commandments and his statutes, which I command you today.

Deuteronomy 27:9-10

Then one by one commandments and statutes governing the covenant relation between God and this people were read out.

Here are some :

“Cursed be anyone who dishonors his father or his mother.’
And all the people shall say, **‘AMEN’**.

“Cursed be anyone who misleads a blind man on the road.’
And all the people shall say, **‘AMEN’**.

“Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’
And all the people shall say, **‘AMEN’**.

Deuteronomy 27:16; 18; and 26

The AMEN is an affirmation that calls on God to witness and to sustain what is being asserted. “Verily” or “Truly” does not quite cut it. It does not carry the weight that the Hebrew use in the Bible wants to convey. AMEN always brings God into

the situation, as witness, and as the LORD who gives divine power and strength to the AMEN. We are right to add AMEN to our prayers for all our prayers insist that God is attentive to our words of praise, thanksgiving, petition, and to every cry of anguish and pain we make. By retaining AMEN we are expressing our faith that God is a good listener.

When the so-called Good Thief hears *AMEN, I say to you ...*” he knows he is safe in God’s hands. St Paul gives us an assurance that all are prayers pass through the merciful heart of Jesus:

*For all the promises of God find their **YES** in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our **Amen** to God for his glory.*

II Corinthians 1:20.

J. O’H.

