



# The Holy See

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SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR OCEANIA OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

**EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION**

***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II***

*Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe*

*22 November 1998*

1. “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”. This is the title put on the cross. Shortly before Christ’s death, one of the two condemned men crucified with him said to him: “Jesus, remember me *when you come into your kingdom*”. What kingdom? The object of his request was certainly not an earthly kingdom but another one.

The good thief speaks as if he had heard the words exchanged earlier between Pilate and Christ. Indeed, it was before Pilate that Jesus had been accused of wanting to make himself king. Pilate had questioned him about this: “Are you the King of the Jews” (Jn 18:33). Christ had not denied it; he had explained: “My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world” (Jn 18:36). Jesus had replied directly to Pilate’s repeated question as to whether he were a king: “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice” (Jn 18:37).

2. Today’s Liturgy speaks of the earthly kingdom of Israel by recalling the anointing of David as King. Yes, God had chosen Israel; he sent it not only prophets but even kings, when the Chosen People insisted on having an earthly ruler. Of all the kings who sat upon the throne of Israel, the greatest was David. When the first reading of this celebration speaks of that kingdom, it does so to recall that Jesus of Nazareth was of the line of King David, but also, and above all, to emphasize that the royalty proper to Christ is of a different kind.

The words which Mary heard at the Annunciation are significant: “The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end” (*Lk* 1:32-33). This kingdom, then, is not only the earthly kingdom of David, which came to an end. It is the Kingdom of Christ, which will never end, the eternal Kingdom, the Kingdom of truth, of love and of eternal life.

The Good Thief crucified with Jesus came in some way to the heart of this truth. Indeed, in a certain sense he became a prophet of this eternal Kingdom when, hanging on the cross, he said: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (*Lk* 23:42). Christ said in reply: “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (*Lk* 23:43).

3. To this Kingdom, which is not of this world, Jesus invited us to look when he taught us to pray: “Thy Kingdom come”. Obedient to his command, the Apostles, the disciples and the missionaries of all times have done their best to extend, through evangelization, the boundaries of this Kingdom. For it is both the gift of the Father (cf. *Lk* 12:32) and the result of man’s personal response. In the “new creation”, we will be able to enter into the Kingdom of the Father only if we have followed the Lord during our earthly pilgrimage (cf. *Mt* 19:28).

This, then, is the programme of every Christian: to follow the Lord, the Way, and the Truth, and the Life, in order to possess the Kingdom which he has promised and given. Today, in this solemn Eucharistic concelebration, we are inaugurating the Special Assembly for Oceania of the Synod of Bishops, which has as its theme: “*Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania: Walking his Way, Telling his Truth and Living his Life*”.

Welcome, venerable and dear Brothers in the Episcopate, who have the pastoral care of the particular Churches of the Continent of Oceania. Together with you I greet all those who will take part in the work of the Synod and all who have been active in its preparation. I would also like to extend a cordial greeting to the Christian communities and the peoples of Oceania who are spiritually united with us at this moment.

“Jesus, the Incarnate Word, was sent by the Father to the world to bring it salvation, to proclaim and establish the Kingdom of God... The Father, in raising him from the dead, made him, perfectly and for ever, the Way, and the Truth, and the Life, for all who believe” (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 5). That farflung portion of the Church, which extends over the immense spaces of Oceania, knows the Way and it knows that there it will find the Truth and the Life: the way of the Gospel, the way pointed out by the Saints and the Martyrs who gave their lives for the Gospel (cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, 4).

4. As the universal Church prepares to cross the threshold of the third Christian millennium, the Pastors of Oceania are gathered in communion, united with the Successor of Peter, to give new energy to the pastoral concern which spurs them to proclaim the kingship of Christ in the diversity

of cultures and human, social and religious traditions, and in the remarkable variety of their peoples.

In the second reading the Apostle Paul explains the nature of the kingdom of which Jesus speaks. He writes to the Colossians: we must give thanks to God who “has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (1:13-14). It is precisely this *forgiveness of sins* which the good thief inherited on Calvary. He was the first to experience the fact that *Christ is King, because he is the Redeemer*.

The Apostle then explains what Christ’s kingship is: “He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities — all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:15-17). *Thus Christ is King above all as the first-born of all creation*.

The Pauline text continues: “He is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. 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” (ibid., 1:18-20). With these words the Apostle again confirms and justifies what he had revealed about the essence of Christ’s kingship: Christ is King as the *first-born of the dead*. In other words, as *Redeemer of the world, the risen and crucified Christ is King of the new humanity*.

5. “*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom*” (Lk 23:42).

On Calvary Jesus had a rather unusual companion in his passion, a thief. For this unhappy man the way of the cross became, infallibly, the way to paradise (cf. Lk 23:43), the way to truth and life, the way to the kingdom. Today we remember him as the “good thief”. On this solemn occasion when we gather round the altar of Christ to open a Synod concerned with an entire continent and its problems and hopes, we can make the “good thief’s” prayer our own:

“Jesus, remember me, remember us, remember the peoples to whom the Pastors gathered here daily give the living and true bread of your Gospel, across immense spaces, by sea and by land. As we pray that your kingdom come, we see that your promise is becoming a reality: after following you, we come to you in your kingdom, drawn by you when you were lifted up on the Cross (cf. Jn 12:32); to you, lifted up over history and its centre, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (cf. Rv 22:13), the Lord of time and the ages!

We address you in the words of an ancient hymn:

It is through your sorrowful death, King of eternal glory,  
that you obtained eternal life for the nations;  
therefore the whole world calls you King of humanity.  
Reign over us, Christ the Lord!”.

Amen.

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