



Homily given by
His Eminence
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**SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,
THE KING OF THE UNIVERSE**
Christ the King Cathedral, Hamilton, Ontario,
November 23, 2014

“I will follow Him...”

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am sure many of you remember the very popular movie and Broadway show “*Sister Act*” that starred Whoopie Goldberg in a nun’s convent pursuing the renewal of a rundown parish. One song from that movie is still very popular. Although the lyrics were not meant to be religious, they were transposed in this circumstance for a religious setting. Will you sing with me ?

I will follow Him,
Follow Him wherever he may go
And near Him I always will be
For nothing can keep me away
He is my destiny

Following Jesus... choosing to follow Him is one of the most important decisions of our lives. As we celebrate the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, we are affirming that we belong to Him, that we have chosen to follow Him as our Master, our Savior, our Lord and our King. Now why would we want to make such a decision ? Why do we celebrate Christ the King, year after year ? We walk in the footsteps and accept to be guided by a King that is full of mercy and love for each one of us, for all of humanity. The prayer of the Preface sums it

up in these beautiful words : “a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace”. That is what Jesus came to establish in our midst and that is what he expects of us.

The Prophet Ezekiel’s words reveal to us how the Lord brings about his kingdom: “ *Thus says the Lord God : I myself will look after and tend my sheep. As a shepherd tends his flock when he finds himself among his scattered sheep, so will I tend my sheep. [...] The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy, shepherding them rightly*”.

That is how Jesus established his kingdom among us, by his closeness, his tender loving care for all, especially for those most in need of salvation, of new life, of hope. Pope Francis has helped us immensely to rediscover how we as followers of Jesus Christ, as his disciples, are called to live our vocation and our mission in the world with the same attitudes and commitment, with the same love for our brothers and sisters. I truly believe that we could change significantly the face of the earth if we accepted to put our love in action a little more every day ; if we were more conscious that it is in our daily lives that we evangelize and touch people. But for that to happen, we need to continue to follow Him, to follow Jesus. We need to be solidly rooted in His Word and fed by his Body and Blood.

Have you heard of the conversation that took place one day in a Canadian forest ? It was in a Quebec, a maple forest if I am not mistaken. A leaf from a maple tree had a conversation with a root from the same tree. The beautiful green leaf is high up in the tree. It overlooks the forest, balancing in the wind and has a great view of the scenery. The root, as you can imagine, is pretty discrete, way down, mostly underground. The proud leaf engages in a conversation with the root and says : “*Oh, hi there! What are you doing way down there ?*” “*I am a root. I feed the whole tree. I send the sap and minerals up to the trunk, to the branches and to the leaves so that you will have life and grow.*” “*Oh*”, responded the leaf, “*that must be so boring. You down there and me way up here...*” And the root responds: “*Well, what do you say we continue this conversation when autumn comes around ?*”

Dear brothers and sisters, to establish the Kingdom of God in today’s world, we need to be rooted in Jesus Christ, in the Gospel of Life. We may have lost a few leaves in the past decades. There have been storms and long harsh winters, but like the maple tree, we are called to a new Spring, called to once again bear fruit. As we contemplate today Christ the King of the Universe, we are invited to open our lives to this universal mission that the Lord entrusts to us, to make all things new in Him.

Saint Paul in the second reading we heard does not hesitate in reminding us that it is a conversion process, an ongoing process, and we rely on Jesus, on His Paschal Mystery, on his death and resurrection to give us new life: « *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. When everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all* ».

Brothers and sisters, please don’t be discouraged if you are not yet fully converted. Please don’t lose hope. I saw a bumper sticker once that made me smile. It read : “Please be patient.

God isn't finished with me yet !” I once read in a book this affirmation that has helped me very much. It goes like this: “God love you just as you are, but he refuses to leave you like that !” He loves you deeply. You are his beloved son or daughter, but he wants you to be happier, holier, filled with life and truth. When you love someone, you always want that person to be better.

It is in opening our heart and our life to welcome in the Kingdom of God that we are transformed and renewed and can become missionary disciples in today's world. If we do not follow Him, Jesus Christ, who will we follow? Who will lead us to abundant life ? What will guide our lives ? I love the Apostle Peter's response to Jesus: “*Lord, to whom shall we go ? You have the words of eternal life*” (John 6: 68).

How will we proclaim that we adhere to Jesus' words ? Today, as we congregate in all of the churches of the world to celebrate the Lord's day of Victory through his death and resurrection, we profess that Jesus is our King, and that we want to continue to live and build his kingdom. And as we leave to go in all directions after this celebration, we will do our best to imitate Jesus' works of mercy and love. Pope Francis reminds us that : “The one who accomplishes these works shows that he has welcomed Christ's sovereignty, because he has opened his heart to God's charity. In the twilight of life we will be judged on our love for, closeness to and tenderness towards our brothers and sisters” (Homily, November 23, 2014).

It appears to me as particularly significant that the Diocese of Hamilton has decided to bestow papal honours to members of this community on the Feast of Christ the King. Lay men and women of multiple walks of life, consecrated brothers and sisters who have served generously in their everyday lives. To all of you today, recipients of these prestigious papal honours, the Lord Jesus, our King says : « *Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me* ».

We thank God for all the good you have accomplished in so many different fields, serving God, serving His People, serving humanity. Can you just imagine if we could have invited today all the people you have served, touched and helped along the way in your life by putting your talents, your charisms and gifts in serving your brothers and sisters! It would be overwhelming. You accomplished this one day at a time, loving and serving one person at a time. Thank you for sharing your life with others. Thank you for showing us how the decision to follow Him produces abundant fruit in our own lives and in the lives of others.

And for the rest of us who will not be receiving a medal today, may our lives, rooted in Christ bring us to experience a more intense relationship with Christ the King, our Savior and Lord, and may we find in Him, in His example, a call to continue to love and serve all the days of our lives until we are called to the eternal Kingdom. All of this is possible, if everyday, we choose to continue to follow Him as individuals and as a community of missionary disciples.