

Gospel – Lk 23: 35-43

During the campaign leading up to the last election we heard several references to President Obama's legacy. Secretary Clinton told us we cannot trust Barack Obama's legacy to Donald Trump. The President himself told us although he wasn't on the ballot, his legacy was. President-Elect Trump told us he would rescind President Obama's executive orders, a large part of his legacy, and working with congress he would repeal the Affordable Care Act. I wonder, how much of a legacy is it if it could be undone with a stroke of another man's pen.

In today's gospel Jesus forgives the criminal hanging with him, a man or church calls St. Dismas. While Dismas means thief, it's almost sure he wasn't merely a thief. Crucifixion was reserved for the most heinous of crimes, murder or insurrection or for a slave who struck his master. But whatever his crime was, St. Dismas left an enduring legacy. It's nowhere near as great as that of the Savior dying next to him who left us the Church, the Sacraments, our redemption and the possibility of spending eternity with God. Dismas only left us a simple prayer, "Jesus remember me" and the unshakable knowledge that however we have lived, at any point in our lives, we can turn to Jesus with faith and contrition and he will forgive us.

God's love is limitless. It's infinite, and it's perfect. Psalm 8 says "When I see the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars that you arranged, what is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him?" Imagine, if you will, that from the first moment of creation you were the only person who ever committed a sin. Do you believe that Jesus would have endured his passion and horrible death only for you? I know he would have done so if I was that only sinner, because he cares for me so deeply. But what a poor response I often make to God's loving care! And I doubt that I'm unique in that regard.

Today is the feast of Christ the King, the end of the liturgical year. What have we done to build our legacy? What have we done to make someone else's life a little better? Remember Jesus told us that whatever we do for one of his least brothers we do for him. So, what have we done ... for him?

Regardless what we have done this past year, we also need to look forward to next year. So, since next Sunday is a new Church Year, let's make liturgical New Year's Resolutions. We fail in many of our annual resolutions because they are nebulous goals such as lose some weight or exercise more or improve our prayer life. To actually accomplish our resolutions, we need to quantify them, include a time boundary, and most importantly create a plan that tells us how we will achieve the goal. So, let's get specific with our liturgical new year's resolutions.

St. James tells us that faith without works is dead. He challenged people to show them their faith without works, and he would show them his faith through his works. So here are some ideas for liturgical new year's resolutions. Teach REP classes, become Eucharistic ministers to the homebound, or participate in the works of the Knights of Columbus or St. Vincent de Paul Society. But there are many opportunities to live our Catholic faith outside of the parish. Mary's Shelter is a refuge for teenage moms and their babies. Several of the girls have been trafficked, even by their parents and some in their early teens or even before. CASA provides a powerful voice for children in the child welfare system. Catholic Detention Ministries volunteers conduct Communion services, bible studies, and hold one on one meetings with our brothers and sisters in the Orange County jails. Big Brothers / Big Sisters provide children facing adversity with professionally supported, one-to-one mentoring relationships. And this list is only a beginning to get you thinking. How can I build a legacy that will last?

One organization that holds a special place in my heart is the Red Cross. I encourage anyone who is able to do so to become a regular blood, or preferably platelets, donor. While working for the organizations mentioned earlier will make a person's life better, our blood or platelet donations will save a person's life. If you're interested, see me after Mass, and I will give you contact and hours of operation information.

Your legacy and mine might not be as sweeping as the works of say St. Theresa of Calcutta or Pope St. John Paul II, but for those whose lives we impact, it can be just as important. So, next year let's all work on building our legacy by getting involved in some community organization, and spread God's love in a world that so desperately needs to feel it.