How is your prayer life at this time? When you go into the silence of your room or when you come earlier into this Church and place yourself, once again in all humility before God, what do you pray for? Very often we pray for our families and our relatives; we pray for people who are sick and for those who suffer, especially those we know. We come in humility before a God who listens to us and we recognize what’s going on in the world and in our country, especially after the elections… we see how divided we are in so many ways… But as we come to the end of this Liturgical Year and as the end of this calendar year is closer, and as we come to the closing of this Jubilee Year of Mercy, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe…!

Our prayer very often is so complex but as we heard in today’s Gospel, the prayer of one of the criminals hanging there with Jesus was a very simple, but profound prayer. He didn’t pray to be released from his suffering and fate, he didn’t ask for the destruction of the people who imposed the death penalty on him! This man acknowledged what he had done, whatever it was, he recognized that he had been condemned justly! And then the prayer is uttered… “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

This was a simple prayer but a very profound and powerful one! This criminal, in the last moments of his life, recognizes Jesus as a King! This man about to be executed somehow sees that kingdom with the eyes of his heart and wants to be part of it!! This criminal next to Jesus steals heaven in his last breath! In a way, he doesn’t ask for much… He asks to be remembered! He didn’t ask directly to be part of that kingdom… he didn’t feel worthy of it. He just asked Jesus to remember him. At the end of this Jubilee Year of Mercy, we hear mercy itself!! “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Mercy has spoken! In just a moment, as he
recognizes the power of the one who seems to be powerless, he becomes, maybe once again, a thief… but this time as he just asks to be remembered, he steals eternal life from Life itself! At that moment, God delivered this man “from the power of darkness and transferred [him] to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins” as we heard in the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians.

This Jesus who is King of the Universe doesn’t reign from a beautiful golden throne; he doesn’t wear a crown adorned with beautiful stones. He doesn’t wear precious clothes. He hangs from a wooden Cross, wears a crown of thorns and his body shows the marks of his torture and of the passion. This is the King we follow… and this King invites us with open arms to embrace him and in embracing him, to embrace all creation with our minds and our hearts. In that embrace and in that invitation he calls us to be merciful and forgiving. As the Year of Mercy comes to an end, the acts of mercy must continue! What we reflected upon and celebrated this whole year must give fruit and become stronger day by day!

The world challenges us daily to choose the rule of other powers: greed, violence, indifference, cruelty, aggression, etc. As a result, accepting Jesus’ rule is not a once-and-for all act, but it needs to be renewed each day by the deliberate choices we make. Being members in the reign of God, under Jesus’ kingship, can be very discouraging at times.

So much of his reign is incomplete or fragmentary in our world. A quick glance at today’s headlines will confirm that! There’s more to be done to make Jesus’ “peaceable Kingdom” a reality in this life—not only in our surrounding world and within our Christian community, but also within in each of us.

Today, we must learn from the man hanging next to Jesus. St. Augustine tells us that “Others failed to recognize the Lord even as he performed miracles, but this man recognized him as he hung upon the cross… with his heart he believed, and with his lips he made [a] confession… Today you are with me on the tree of the cross, and today you will be with me on the tree of salvation.” As we continue celebrating Jesus Christ as King of the Universe, and as we come the end of this Jubilee Year of Mercy, may we come to understand the Mercy of God in our lives and extend that mercy to all. Today we ask the Lord to remember us as we remember Him until he comes again!