



*Homily – Memorial of the Vietnamese Martyrs /
Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universeⁱ*

*The Most Rev. José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles*

*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is a joy for me to celebrate this Holy Eucharist with you in this beautiful liturgy for the Holy Martyrs of Vietnam. This celebration is a reminder of the beautiful communion of cultures in our Catholic faith.

Faith in Jesus Christ creates transforms cultures from within. And as we see in this beautiful liturgy, as our worship is beautifully woven in the language and traditions of Vietnam.

In the early Church they used to say: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians.”

And this has always been true — from the first persecutions in Rome to our own day, when many people around the world still suffer cruelty and violence for believing in Jesus Christ.

Today we honor more than 100 holy martyrs. Their blood, shed for the truth they had found in Christ, became the seed for generations of Christians in Vietnam. From their suffering, a courageous Church was born and this beautiful and fruitful Vietnamese Catholic culture.

So today we give thanks to Almighty God for their fidelity to the cross of Christ.

The Church and the Catholic people of Vietnam, as we all know, continue to face many trials. So today in a special way, we also want to ask the intercession of these holy martyrs, that God may grant our friends and family the grace they need to stay faithful in their trials and to always know the love of Jesus in their lives.

We also want to give thanks to God today for the beautiful gifts of the Vietnamese Catholic community — here in Los Angeles and all across our country.

My brothers and sisters, you are a treasure to our American Church.

All the beautiful things we see in our celebration today — your love for family; the joy of your faith; your devotion to the Church; your spirit of self-giving expressed in so many vocations to the priesthood and religious life — all of these are seeds that will inspire renewal, a new vitality and holiness in our Church, here in America and all around the world.

It is fitting that we are remembering these martyrs today on the Solemnity of Christ the King. Because these martyrs all died for this truth — that there is no king but Jesus Christ. That nothing in our lives should be more important than Jesus Christ. And no one should deny our freedom to live our faith in Jesus.

Blessed John Paul II, who canonized these martyrs, said: “They gave testimony that it is necessary to adore the one Lord as the personal God who made heaven and earth. . . . They affirmed their freedom to believe, holding with humble courage that the Christian religion was the only thing that they could not abandon, that they could not disobey the supreme Sovereign: the Lord.”ⁱⁱ

What a beautiful witness on this final Sunday of the Church’s liturgical year, as we celebrate the reality that Jesus Christ is our King.

Jesus Christ is the Lord of the universe! Because he is the Creator. Through him all things were made. He upholds the universe by his Word of power.ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus Christ is a King who loves us with a human heart. That is what we have just heard in the first reading for today’s Mass, from the prophet Ezekiel. Our King is a Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost and those who have strayed. He is our healer and one who gives us strength.

St. Paul tells us in today’s second reading: *He must reign!*

Jesus Christ the King must rule in our hearts and in our souls. That means we have to put Jesus at the center of everything in our lives.

We need to have a strong desire to be holy and to do *his will* in all things. His will for our lives and his will for the universe, for the Kingdom. Doing his will must be the most important thing in our lives and the center of all of our daily activities. *Thy will be done!*

So let us pray for the grace to let Christ reign as the King of our hearts! Let us revolve to try harder to conform our lives — all our thoughts, intentions and actions — to the will of God.

Jesus Christ is a King who came among us as a servant. He came to serve, not be served. He came to give his life as a ransom for his subjects.^{iv} He is a King who died so that we might live!

We need to remember: The throne of Christ our King is his cross, and his only weapon is his love!

In all this he is giving an example for us to follow. The example of love expressed in self-giving and self-sacrifice. The example of love that serves.

We are all familiar with those beautiful words that Jesus speaks in the Gospel reading for today: “I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

This is what Christ our King expects of each one of us as his “subjects,” as his disciples.

Love is the only law in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. And today, on this last Sunday in the Church’s liturgical year, Jesus is telling us what true love looks like.

True love feeds the poor and welcomes the immigrant and the homeless. So this is the love we are called to, my brothers and sisters.

It is a beautiful calling to be servants of our King, servants of his love. To love others with the love of God. Through our words — and especially through our actions — to show to others the love that God has for them.

Notice that Jesus does not call us to be martyrs or to do super-human activities. He is asking us to make simple acts of charity and deeds of mercy. To give clothes to someone who does not have any. To give a drink of water to someone who is thirsty.

We are not called to be heroes. We are called to be faithful. In little ways. In little acts of love.

One of my favorite stories from the martyrs of Vietnam is the story of St. Agnes Lê Thị Thành. She was a good mother who taught her children the catechism but also the importance of serving the poor and the vulnerable.

When the government outlawed our Catholic faith in Vietnam in 1841, she helped to hide missionaries in her home. That is what got her arrested.

Like all of the holy martyrs, she refused to renounce Christ by the ugly gesture that the authorities demanded — that she trample on a crucifix. So they tortured her for months in horrible ways.

St. Agnes gave the authorities — and us — a courageous testament of her faith: “I worship the Lord of heaven. Never will I renounce the religion of the sovereign Lord!”^v

So my brothers and sisters, let us give thanks for the witness of St. Agnes and all the holy martyrs of Vietnam. And let us ask for the grace to imitate their fidelity in our own lives.

I entrust you and your families to Our Lady of La Vang; through her intercession may we all gain the grace we need to allow Jesus Christ to rule in our hearts and souls as we serve others for the love of him and seek to build his Kingdom.

ⁱ Readings (Solemnity of Jesus Christ the King): Ezek. 34:11–12, 15–17; Ps. 23:1–6; 1 Cor. 15:20–26, 28; Matt. 25:31–46.

ⁱⁱ Bunson, *John Paul II's Book of Saints* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2007), 163.

ⁱⁱⁱ Heb. 1:3.

^{iv} Matt. 20:28.

^v O'Malley, *Saints of Asia* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2007), 43.