



*These homily notes are to assist the preacher to speak about young people and the Church within the context of the Feast of Christ the King.*

A priest recently described the following scene: a group of boys in their mid teens have agreed to take part in a vigil of prayer, some coming along to the chapel to spend time praying before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar while some also go to confession. One boy spends much longer than the others in prayer and eventually goes to the priest to ask 'How long have I been here Father?' 'About two hours' replies the priest. 'That's amazing, says the boy, I thought I'd been here about half an hour.' In itself that's a touching story but what transforms it into an amazing story is the context: this is a prison chapel and the boys are all young offenders. The boy who spent two hours in continuous prayer without realising is a young offender, a penitent thief for our time. As he prayed in front of Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament, this teenage prisoner was praying his version of the prayer of the penitent thief that we have just heard in today's gospel: 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

Today the universal Church invites us to join in celebrating the feast of Christ the King and the Church in England/Wales invites us to celebrate the contribution of young people to our communities. Those two dimensions of today's Mass meet in that prison chapel. Young people enjoy taking risks and the Church accompanies them when those risks turn nasty and get them into trouble. 'When I was in prison you visited me' is one of Our Lord's commands to his followers and the Church's chaplaincy service for young offenders is an impressive example of this in action.

But the Church also has a duty to allow its younger members the opportunity to take risks in a safe setting within the community of faith. A beautiful example of this is World Youth Day where the Pope invites the young to travel across the world and join him in a celebration of faith. Some 2 million young people responded to that invitation this year and went to Rio de Janeiro. They took the risk of leaving their familiar surroundings to join in a series of events culminating in a vigil and Mass on Copacabana beach. The whole world was moved by those pictures of two million young people on the beach with the Pope. Every year we see something similar when young people join a [our diocesan] pilgrimage to Lourdes, working with other pilgrims who are disabled or ill. To serve a person with a serious disability or illness may at first disconcert a young helper. But it's inspiring to see how they overcame their hesitation and take the risk of befriending the person they serve, often discovering a new kind of friendship. *You can add your own examples of young people taking good risks.*

Today we give thanks for the energy and creativity that young people bring to our parish (and to our school) *Consider giving some local examples of work and projects undertaken by young parishioners and/or students in your local Catholic school. Consider inviting a young person to say a word about one of these at the end of Mass.*

So we rejoice that Christ is King of all creation and we give thanks for the young people whose faith and commitment shows the kingdom of God in action in refreshing ways. Christ is a King who travels alongside all his people, young and old, so as we see his grace at work in young lives, we all have confidence to make our own the prayer of the penitent thief: 'Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.'