

25. August 2022

## Saint Louis of France: model of a Christian king

Lk 19:12-19

Reading for the memorial of Saint Louis of France

*At that time, Jesus spoke this parable: 'A man of noble birth went to a distant country to be appointed king and then return. He summoned ten of his servants and gave them ten pounds, telling them, "Trade with these, until I get back." But his compatriots detested him and sent a delegation to follow him with this message, "We do not want this man to be our king." 'Now it happened that on his return, having received his appointment as king, he sent for those servants to whom he had given the money, to find out what profit each had made by trading. The first came in, "Sir," he said, "your one pound has brought in ten." He replied, "Well done, my good servant! Since you have proved yourself trustworthy in a very small thing, you shall have the government of ten cities." Then came the second, "Sir," he said, "your one pound has made five." To this one also he said, "And you shall be in charge of five cities."*

A few days ago we spoke about St. Helena, an extraordinary empress, who left us as a priceless legacy the true Cross of Christ that she found on Calvary and the service she rendered to the Church, so that she could expand peacefully throughout the Roman Empire. Today, following the liturgical calendar, we meet an exemplary king, who also acted out of his Christian faith. Particularly today, when the rulers of this world often show rejection or even hostility towards our holy faith, it is comforting to know that even people with great political power can think and act very differently from what we are used to see nowadays.

Saint Louis was born in 1214 and was crowned king of France just eleven years later as Louis IX. For the first eleven years of his rule, he was under the tutelage of his mother, from whom he inherited and learned piety. He married Marguerite of Provence, who bore him eleven children. Thanks to his conciliatory attitude in the disputes between the Pope and the Emperor during the First Council of Lyon, he gained great prestige throughout Europe.

In 1239 he acquired the valuable relics of the Crown of Thorns of Jesus, the most precious of all relics. Louis thus considered himself the successor of King Solomon, and Paris became a new Jerusalem, which was to preserve this holy relic until the End of Time. In the same year, Saint Louis left for his first Crusade. In Jerusalem he was able to reorganise the administration and build fortresses. In 1267, at the height of his prestige and power in France, he decided to undertake his second Crusade, which took him to North Africa, where he hoped to convert the Muslim sultan of Tunis. However, the plague wiped out his army and also took the life of the king himself, who had been committed to caring for the plague-stricken and dying.

Saint Louis had been a tertiary of the Trinitarians. According to tradition, his private life would have been more like that of a religious than that of a king. He is described as a humble and patient man, a benign father, full of affection and compassion for the poor and sick. Legend has it that he would hand out food from his own plate over and over again. Thus St. Louis, having been a true defender of the faith and a just ruler, became the ideal of a Christian king.

In two letters addressed to his sons, we can see that he was very keen to pass on his Christian convictions as a ruler. Here is a brief summary of these letters. To his son Philip III he wrote

*“Dear son,*

*the first thing I advise is that you fix your whole heart upon God, and love Him with all your strength, for without this no one can be saved or be of any worth. You should, with all your strength, shun everything which you believe to be displeasing to Him.*

*And you ought especially to be resolved not to commit mortal sin, no matter what may happen and should permit all your limbs to be hewn off, and suffer every manner of torment, rather than fall knowingly into mortal sin.*

*If our Lord send you any adversity, whether illness or other in good patience, and thank Him for it, thing, you should receive it in good patience and be thankful for it, for you ought to believe that He will cause everything to turn out for your good; and likewise you should think that you have well merited it.*

*If our Lord send you any prosperity, either health of body or other thing you ought to thank Him humbly for it, and you ought to be careful that you are not the worse for it, either through pride or anything else, for it is a very great sin to fight against our Lord with His gifts.*

*I advise you that you listen willingly and devoutly the services of Holy Church, and, when you are in church, avoid to frivolity and trifling, and do not look here and there; but pray to God with lips and heart alike. Have a tender pitiful heart for the poor, and for all those whom you believe to be in misery of heart or body, and, according to your ability, comfort and aid them with some alms. Dear son, give thanks to God often for all the good things He has done for you, so that you may be worthy to receive more.*

*Be just towards your subjects. Keep to the path of justice and do not deviate to the right or to the left! Always side with the poor rather than the rich until you are sure you have found the truth.”*

To his daughter Isabella, Queen of Navarre, he addressed the following lines:

*“Dear daughter, I teach you to love our Lord with all your heart and with all your strength, for without this nothing can be truly valuable for us.*

*Dear daughter, if you love him, you will profit from it. A creature goes wrong who puts the love of his heart elsewhere than on him.*

*Dear daughter, the measure with which you should love him is: to love him without measure. He well deserves that we love him, for he first loved us. I wish you would think of the deeds that the blessed Son of God has done for our salvation.*

*Dear daughter, place great importance on pleasing Him and be careful to avoid everything that you know displeases Him. In particular, be willing not to commit any mortal sin, in any case, whatever may come, and rather have all your limbs cut off and your life taken than commit them.*

*Dear daughter, get into the habit of confessing frequently and always seek good confessors who lead a holy life and are educated, from whom you can be instructed about what you should avoid and about what you should do.*

*Dear daughter, like to hear our Lord speak in sermons and private conversations! Avoid private conversations except with people who excel in goodness and holiness! ...*

*Dear daughter, have a compassionate heart towards all people you hear of who are in inner or bodily distress, and help them either by words or by almsgiving, as far as you can afford it.*

*Our Lord make you good in all things, as I wish and more than I could wish. Amen.”*