This weekend we celebrate the feast of Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. During his time of active ministry there were many who tried to carry Jesus off to be their king. They wanted a Jewish King, like David, who would be a messiah to rescue them from the domination of the Roman Empire. Jesus didn’t allow this; rather he fled into the wilderness to avoid this misunderstanding of his mission. (John 6:15)

In today’s Gospel from Luke we see the results of the people’s desire and misunderstanding around Jesus’ kingship. Jesus’ message of forgiveness for sinners, healing of the sick, and the announcing of the Kingdom of God got everyone’s attention. His correction of the self-righteous, won for him the contempt of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Temple officials. They appealed to their Roman collaborators to deal with Jesus’ challenge to their status quo. They convinced them to condemn this “man who would be King.” At the end of the day the Romans gave Jesus both a crown and a throne. … A thorny crown and a cruciform throne. But this is not the end of the story.

All this violent opposition did not deter Jesus’ bringing to fruition his peaceful mission. He would complete his Father’s mission despite its difficulty and man’s effort to the contrary. His mission to Jerusalem was to speak the truth to power, and oppose the despots in a non-violent way. He taught five powerful lessons as he completed his mission. Jesus teaches these lessons, these hard truths, by his very presence on the cross. They are transformative messages, yet they are difficult to assimilate in our lives, but they are important for our maturity as Christians.
The Lessons:

I. **Life is hard.** The hardness of life is never more evident than in injury and sickness. The naked and bleeding Jesus. Being abandoned, rejected, and left alone by one's friends and community is also life at its hardest. This is especially true if it is due, not to our own fault, but because of misunderstanding, and prejudices. Even when we bear part of the fault for our rejection, the lack of forgiveness is unnecessary and it is what Jesus calls us to with his words from the cross, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34) What is called for in the face of this truth is not to deny or medicate all our pain away but to embrace it so that our pain can have meaning. As Jesus embraced the cross – so we too should daily take up our cross and follow Him. (Luke 9:23) Denying this truth only magnifies and exacerbates the suffering in our lives.

II. **You're going to die.** Death is always the final act in all of our lives, yet we deny it most of our time on earth. Death is, in fact, a part of life itself. “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. (John 12:24) As Irish rock group, Flogging Molly’s song infers, no one gets out alive, so get over it. (“If I Ever Leave this World Alive”) This truth is not to be morbid, but rather underlines the preciousness of each day we are given. The finiteness of our life is to be used on doing the good that is needed in the world and not to be squandered on trivial pursuits. As St. Paul wrote, (Galatians 2:19-20)

> “I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.”

III. **You are not in control.** The image of Jesus nailed to the cross is as horrific an image of powerlessness as one can imagine. Their taunts, “He saved others let him save himself…” & “If you are the king of the Jews save yourself,” provokes questions in me, like, “Why didn’t he come down from the cross? Wouldn’t this convince the disbelievers once and for all?” The reason he didn’t come down from the cross was simply because, He was nailed to the cross. He was not God masquerading as a man. Jesus was the God-Man, and his humanity was nailed to the cross. This is a strong reminder that we also are not in control. We humans need to discover the limits of our resources, and the limit of our own abilities to control outcomes. Then, when we have come to the reality of our own limits, we will learn to trust and rely on the Other. Jesus relied on his Father as he entered his passion, but he first prayed “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39) Jesus models for us that there is a finite limit to what we can accomplish in this world, and that God is in control and therefore we need to trust Him. This begins with admitting our own powerlessness.

IV. **You are not that important.** Humility is of central importance for human truth and happiness. We must come to know ourselves truly as children of God, and not little princes or demigods. We are only human – (Humus: Earth; ground) formed from the dust of the earth. (Cf. Genesis 2:7) Creating our own inflated-self will continually require reassurance from others and is impossible to maintain. The maintenance of and the insistence on our imperial self, will not bring us peace, but strife. Strife for others and ourselves. The cost to maintain our status will usually be at others’ expense. Humility is what is called for, and again, Jesus is the best example one could have for humility. The Creator submitting to be like us in all things – by choice – and experiencing the worst that life could bring. “Though harshly treated, he submitted and did not open his mouth; like a lamb led to slaughter or a sheep silent before shearsers, he did not open his mouth.” (Isaiah 53: 7 & Matthew 26:63)
V. **Your life is not about you.** We are to be, about life. We are a part of a greater whole that we call Christ – we are literally the Body of Christ. Jesus never asked us to do anything that he did not do himself. As he placed himself at the service of others – the sick, the imprisoned, the despised, the outsider – so too are we to be for the least and the littlest. As he spoke the truth to the powerful, so too are we to speak the truth of the Gospel and be a voice for the voiceless. As He loved and forgave his enemies – so too are we to love and forgive our enemies. As he laid down his life for us, so too are we to lay down our life for him - as we lay down our lives for others. (John 15:13) We are part of a great and holy mystery.