

More has been written about Jesus than anyone else in history. Within the first 100 years after his death there were already complete books about him, and references to him in other books. No other character in history received this much attention. During his life, though, we only know of one instance when Jesus himself wrote something, and one instance when someone else wrote something about him.

Jesus wrote something in the dirt when his enemies presented to him a woman caught in adultery. Rather than stone her, he wrote something. The gospel never says what he wrote, but tradition says he wrote the sins of those standing around. The crowd dispersed.

We only know of one sentence written about Jesus during his lifetime, and it appears in today's gospel. All four gospels say that when Jesus was crucified, a hand-written notice about him was placed on the cross above his head. The text varies only slightly from one gospel to the next. Luke says it reads, "This is the King of the Jews." John's gospel has "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." In Latin you can say all of that in four words, and the initials of those four words making up the only sentence written about Jesus during his lifetime still appear on the top of many of our devotional crosses: *Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum*, INRI, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

It's ironic because whoever put the sign there – John says it was Pontius Pilate – certainly didn't believe that Jesus was the king of the Jews. It may have served as a warning to anyone who wanted to claim that title, or it could have intended to mock all Jews – as if to say this is the best you can produce as your king.

We believe that Jesus is king; today, the last Sunday of the Church year, we celebrate him as Our Lord Jesus Christ the King, but not the kind of king that Pilate had in mind. Rather, he is king of our hearts and Lord of heaven and earth. When we see his image on the cross, we acknowledge that he is king even over death. Nothing can diminish his power.

The good thief, of all people, recognized this. He says at the end of his life, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He calls Jesus by his first name, a name that means "Savior," and he makes this statement of faith. He believes that even on the cross Jesus is a king, that he is about to enter his kingdom, and that he has the power to remember a poor dying thief. Jesus confirms the faith of this criminal when he says, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise."

Whenever hope seems lost, whenever death is near, we turn to the cross for support. There we find one sentence, our statement of faith: Jesus is our king. There we place our hope that he will remember us. And there we hear his promise, that we who have joined him in suffering will also join him in paradise.