

59 Christ the King            Year A            November 22, 2020  
Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17    Psalm 23    1Corinthians 15:20-26,28    Matthew 25:31-46

Today we are celebrating the Solemnity of Christ the King and the close of the Church's Liturgical Year A. We have traveled a long road through Scripture since the First Sunday of Advent in November last year. Throughout this year we have listened carefully to the Sunday passages from St. Matthew's Gospel about the life and teachings of Jesus and the announcement of the Kingdom of God which Jesus came to establish on earth.

Matthew writes how Jesus devotes all His love, all His time, and all His energy to seeking out the sick, the poor, the lost, and the sinners. In Matthew's Gospel we read about Jesus establishing His Church (Matthew 16:18). Jesus came "not to be served but to serve" and "to give His life as a ransom for the many" (Matthew 20:28).

In today's Gospel we hear about Jesus being a King. So how is Jesus a King? While earthly kings rule from palaces, Christ the King reigns from the Cross. His kingdom is not a place, but a kingdom made up of people who lovingly give their hearts to Him by shaping their lives according to His will. Jesus wants to touch the hearts and minds of all people and claim their souls for God. He exercises His kingship by making known to each one of us the never-failing love of God, His Father.

Jesus is a King who is lifted up on a Cross, drawing all of us close to Himself, telling us by His actions, more than by His words, just how much He loves us. His Kingdom is not one of deceit and destruction but one of truth and life. It is a kingdom, not of exploitation, hatred, and violence, but a kingdom of justice, love and peace. As members of the Catholic Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, each one of us is called to be a sacrament of Christ's kingdom, an outward sign to the world of what the kingdom of God really is.

To recognize Christ as the King of our lives will mean for us to have a change of heart and a more honest approach in our way of living. Decisions will have to be made on our part about abandoning the short cuts we have been taking in our daily dealings with others. Selfishness, pride, hatred, anger, forgiveness, gossip and injustice must give way to more Christ-like attitudes if we are to follow His message.

The kingship of Christ is made real by allowing God to do His work in us and through us each and every day. The cross and suffering will then become *our* throne also. Jesus calls each of us to take His side in the struggle of furthering the growth of His kingdom on earth. Conforming our hearts and lives to Christ, so that He will always truly be Our Lord and King, is a lifelong process. It takes much discipline, perseverance and grace, which we know is always available to those who are contrite and ask for God's help.

Jesus' Kingdom is also very personal. The Kingdom of Jesus is not about castles, knights in armor, and grand military battles. It is about the liberation of our souls from sin and about setting us free to become the people God intends us to be. Jesus gives us the truth about our life, about ourselves, about our future. And His truth will always sustain us and set us free.

Jesus' Kingdom, His truth, and His grace are as close as every Catholic Church, every Sacrament, every Mass. These are the access points into Christ's Kingdom of saving truth and everlasting life. To be at Mass is to be at the headquarters of the Kingdom of Christ on earth, the centre from which Jesus Christ changes lives and our world. It is the sacrificial bread and wine of the Mass, changing to Jesus' Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, that contain all the power of Christ's death and resurrection.

Let us turn to today's Gospel for a vision of how we are to prepare ourselves to stand in judgment. Images! In today's parable, we see the images of sheep and goats. Figuratively, the sheep and goats are people, you and me, all of us. Jesus is not saying literally that we are either sheep or goats. Rather, Jesus uses images to help the people understand His parables and more importantly, for people to envision who they are in the parables. Thus, this parable describes how on Judgment Day we will see the image of two lines of people.

It is a powerful image as Jesus sits on His glorious throne surrounded by His angels, with the nations assembled before Him waiting to be judged. It is clear that those sheep who have listened to His voice will be welcomed fully into the Kingdom of Heaven, for they will have been living in the Kingdom on earth. The goats, however, will be left aside, having not heeded the commands of the Shepherd, Jesus.

When all of the human race gathers for the great Final Judgment, that is, cave men and women, peoples of Africa, Asians, the people in Hope, rock stars, teachers, farmers, everyone, it is Jesus of Nazareth whom they will face. The entire human race, from the first to the last person will have to appear before the Risen Christ.

How does Jesus distinguish between the sheep and goats, that is, between us the people? The sheep are the people who follow Christ and carry out His mission on earth. It is quite clear in Jesus' teaching in today's parable that salvation for the people who are seen as the sheep is accomplished through a *unity of faith and works*.

We see this unity when Jesus says, "I was naked and you clothed me . . . I was hungry and you fed me . . . Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers [or sisters] of mine, you did it to Me." Christ becomes real to the people around us only insofar as we reach out and show concern for their welfare.

Should our death come before the Final Judgment, we will each have to stand before Christ the King and give an account of how we led our lives. He will then decide whether we will spend eternity in heaven with Him or be forever separated from His love, mercy and goodness. If we have truly made Jesus the King and Ruler of our lives and hearts, then we will have nothing to fear.

The sin of those left out of the kingdom and sent to the darkness is not that they caused harm to those in need, because they *didn't cause* their hunger or nakedness or imprisonment. Their sin is that they did nothing to *help* the poor and needy! Absolutely nothing! They merely looked the other way. We will be judged not only for what we *did* do, but just as importantly for what we failed to do. This is the sin of omission.

There are so many good things we can do to help our brothers and sisters in Christ. Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, "We cannot do great things. We can only *do little things* with great love." When we visit the sick in the hospital, or visit a lonely elder, or give food and clothes to the poor, or befriend a single mother, or give a smile to someone, we are doing it for Christ Himself, not just for the person we are seeing in front of us, for it is actually Christ we are meeting when we do these things. It is not really a question of giving *things to others*. Rather, it is a question of giving of *ourselves*, of our time, our energy, and our love in helping those who are in need. Jesus

says, *“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to Me.”*

We are to love and help those in need without expecting any reward in return. Love can be powerful and strong, working wonders beyond our imagination or expectation. We are capable of love only because God loved us first. We are reminded that when we are helping and loving the less fortunate and those in need, we are helping and loving Christ at the same time. Whenever we help those in need, we are drawing for ourselves a picture of what Christ looks like. We are serving Christ and helping to build His kingdom when we love others sincerely, in simple, practical, everyday ways.

By leading lives of humble and loving service to God and others, we can look forward with joy to the day when we stand before Our Lord. Then we can hear Jesus say, *“Well done my good and faithful servant; come and inherit the Kingdom that has been prepared for you.”* With these words, the teaching of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel now comes to a close.

As we conclude the season of Ordinary time and move into Advent and the start of a new liturgical year, Year B, let each of us take an accounting of our life before the coming of Christ our King. Have we been His loyal subjects? In our prayers and daily living, do we treat Christ as sovereign over us or more as a servant who exists only to do *our* will? The challenge this week is to ask yourself this question, *“How will Jesus judge me? Will it be as one of the sheep or as one of the goats in today’s parable?”*