

Christ the King - A
Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17;
I Corinthians 15:20-26, 28;
Matthew 25:31-46
Little Flower - 11/23/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, commonly called Christ the King. Today also marks the last Sunday of the Church Year. Today's readings suggest three dimensions of Christ's kingship.

The first dimension is found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Having been raised from the dead, Christ became the Lord of life. In John's Gospel, Jesus said, "*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly*" [10:10b]. Therefore, Paul wrote that we shall all be brought to life in Christ. Of course, we have already been brought to life in Christ through baptism. However, in this reading, the emphasis is on resurrection. When Christ rose from the dead, he definitively triumphed over sin, suffering, sickness, and death not only for himself but also for us. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he "*became a life-giving spirit*" [I Cor. 15:45].

The second dimension is found in today's reading from Ezekiel. When we think of kings, we usually think of power and authority. Jesus, however, is a shepherd king. As a shepherd king, he tends to and rescues his flock when they are scattered. In other words, Jesus is a healer and reconciler. Second, he pastures his flock, i.e., he feeds them. Jesus really does feed us. He feeds us through his Word; he feeds us through the Eucharist; he feeds us through others. God's Word, the sacraments, and others are life giving. As you know, I was on retreat this past week. The retreat master kept reminding us that food will only nourish us if we chew it. Wine will only delight us if we savor it. The same is true for God's Word, the sacraments, and quality time with others. The third thing a shepherd does is seek out the lost sheep. Jesus does not wait for us to come to him. He actively pursues us. As one of his parables suggests, he leaves the ninety-nine to search for the lost one.

I think we sometimes have a romanticized image of Jesus the Good Shepherd or Shepherd King. Several times Pope Francis has said that priests should be "shepherds living with 'the smell of the sheep.'"¹ We probably realize that is not a good smell. Therefore, we probably should imagine Jesus the Good Shepherd with the smell of the sheep on him. In other words, Jesus gets down and dirty with us. Jesus meets us and mixes with us in all the messiness and sinfulness of our lives.

The third dimension of Jesus's kingship is judgment. Last week, I mentioned that last Sunday's Gospel and today's Gospel contain two parables about the final judgment, each offering a different criterion of judgment. In last week's parable, the criterion was becoming the best version of ourselves, developing and using all the gifts God has given us. The criterion of judgment in today's Gospel is how we treat those more in need than ourselves: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner. "*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.*"

My brothers and sisters, Jesus, the king of the universe, is life giver, shepherd, and judge. However, even as we read this parable about judgment, we must not forget Jesus' words in John's Gospel, the last Gospel written, the most profound Gospel: "*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him...I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world*" [3:17 & 12:47b]. When I was in high school, a homilist concluded a homily on this Gospel reminding us that Jesus never comes to judge but only to save.

¹Pope Francis, Homily for Chrism Mass, March 28, 2013, [http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-homily-for-
chrism-mass-full-text](http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-homily-for-chrism-mass-full-text).