

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

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, the last Sunday of the liturgical year. To understand the feast, we need to understand its origins. Pope Pius XI instituted this feast in 1925 in the face of rising nationalism, atheism, and fascism to reassert Christ's sovereignty over all forms of political governance. Some of those issues are issues again today.

Most of us picture kings wearing beautiful robes and jeweled crowns, sitting on thrones surrounded by servants, and exercising power and judgment. Jesus is not this kind of king. According to today's reading from Ezekiel, Christ is a shepherd king. In fact, in John's Gospel, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd who knows, loves, and leads his sheep and lays down his life for them. As he says in Mark's Gospel, "*For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many*" [10:45].

As we will hear in today's Preface, the kingdom Jesus came to establish is "an eternal and universal kingdom, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace." However, it is evident as we look around the world that the kingdom of Christ may be among us, but it certainly is not fully realized in our world. The wars between Israel and Hamas and Ukraine and Russia are proofs of this. Rather the kingdom of Christ is within and among us to the extent that we make these values our own and live them in our lives. The kingdom of God will only be fully realized when Christ returns in glory.

Jesus is universal king of creation and salvation. As St. Paul wrote to the Colossians, Jesus is the "*firstborn of all creation*" [1:15]. He wrote, "*...all things were created through him and for him.... and in him all things hold together*" [1:16-17]. For us today, the last phrase is the most important. If Jesus stopped loving us or the world even for an instant, we and the world would not die. We would simply cease to exist.

Likewise, today's reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians proclaims the meaning of Christ's kingship in salvation. Raised from the dead, Jesus is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus leads us through death, i.e., death to selfishness and sin, to our resurrection to new life in Him.

The parable in today's Gospel is one of the most important parables in the Gospels because it is the only portrayal of the last judgment in the Gospels. Note that there is no mention of the practice of religion. Instead, we are told that we love Christ to the extent that we serve the needs of those most in need. This does not mean that attending Mass is not important. Rather, Christ is telling us that religious practice alone will not save us.

Also, note that there is no mention of keeping the Ten Commandments. In other words, just keeping the Ten Commandments will not save us. He is telling us that he is absolutely serious when he tells us "*I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you.*" Our love must be self-revealing, self-giving, and self-sacrificing. It must show itself in concrete service that meets the real needs of those most in need.

My brothers and sisters, you might say, "When do I have to deal with someone who is hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, ill or imprisoned and what could I really do for them?" Pope Francis consistently challenges us to go out to the margins and to the marginalized where we will certainly find people who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, ill, and/or imprisoned. However, during this holiday season, let us not forget those around us who are hungry for affection and understanding, thirsty for someone's arms around them, locked in the prison of self-doubt, and/or stripped of all self-respect.