

November 26, 2023

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus, Christ the King

Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus said to his disciples: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

Background:

This Sunday the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus, Christ the King. It also draws to a close the Liturgical Year. The gospels for the last two Sundays from Matthew's 25th chapter have been preparing for this feast, and in the two preceding parables, Jesus has been preparing his disciples for the coming reign of God. The parable of the ten virgins waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom encouraged the Christian community to remain vigilant. The parable of the master who gave his three servants talents to use while he was absent asks the Christian community to recognize that they have been richly blessed and to reflect on how they have used those blessings.

Equally important to what has gone before today's gospel is what follows. From this point forward, the final events of Jesus' life will be described. Matthew begins the next chapter, "When Jesus finished all these words, he said to his disciples, 'You know that in two days' time it will be Passover, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.' Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they consulted together to arrest Jesus by treachery and put him to death. But they said, 'not during the festival, that there may not be a riot among the people,'" (Matthew 26:1-5). The next thing Matthew describes is the anointing of Jesus' head with costly perfumed oil. Jesus remarks that this has been done in preparation for his burial. As Matthew unfolds the events of Jesus' own passion and death, the image of Christ as King seems to stand in stark contrast to the events that will follow. There is a contradiction between who Jesus really is and the reality that is unfolding in his life. But that contradiction is only on the surface. From God's point of view, Jesus is faithful to what he has come to reveal – God's desire to be with us and share God's life with us. Jesus is faithful to that mission and does not flinch from that mission even when he faces and endures rejection and the cross. Jesus' faithfulness calls the disciples and all of us to be faithful and live with the contradictions of our lives.

The image of a shepherd separating sheep and goats would be familiar to people in Matthew's community. Sheep and goats were the first animals to be domesticated. They were pastured together. At night, the sheep could be left outside but goats needed protection from the cold. When sheep were slaughtered, they seemed to

accept their fate, offering no resistance or crying out. In this, they modeled honorable masculine traits, like that men were expected to accept and endure the hardships of life without complaint.

The “sheep” are gathered on the favored right side because they are more valuable. The criteria for being on the right or the left are not prayer, ritual observance, belief, or even outstanding generosity or compassion. Being counted among the favored requires that one has provided the most basic of human needs for others: food, water, clothing, and visiting the sick and imprisoned. The kinds of things that every person can extend to one another. It takes no special talent or position in life to offer this kind of care to another. Even though both the blessed and the accursed did not recognize Jesus, he identifies himself with the “least brothers.”

Earlier in the gospel, Jesus states that those who receive his disciples as they go about preaching will be rewarded. “And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple--amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.” (Matthew 10:42) There is also a sense in Matthew that those who come in the name of God come with the authority of the one who sends them. “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.” (Matthew 10:40) Here, the text suggests that caring for the needs of the little ones or choosing to ignore their needs is taken, by Christ, as a sign of one’s acceptance or rejection of Christ who has sent them.

Reflection Questions

1. Try to imagine the scene as Matthew describes it in the first two verses of the text: The Son of Man in glory, all the angels are present, the throne, and every person of every nation is assembled. Pretend for a few minutes that you have the means to commission a group of artists to capture this scene on a large wall. What would you tell your artists that you wanted included in the image?
2. Given the changes that have been part of your life during the last year, how has your view of yourself, others, and the world around you changed?
3. Who are the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the ill, and the imprisoned in your community?
4. How are they different from those who are poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn, etc?
5. What do you make of the fact that in the gospel both groups did not recognize their significance to Christ in their interaction?
6. When you extend a kindness to another, or donate to charities, what is important to you as you decide where and to whom you will share of your wealth or time?
7. Why do you think the Church has selected this text for the feast of Christ the King?
8. Can you talk to God about how you feel about this parable, whatever has risen within you as you prayed and reflected on this gospel text?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com.

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscclalledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from readings for November 26, 2023, Solemnity: Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Thus says the Lord God: I myself will look after and tend my sheep, as a shepherd tends his flock. I will rescue them from where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark. I will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest. The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy, shepherding them rightly. As for you, my sheep, I will judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose. Beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul. He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Only goodness and kindness follow me all my life; I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Brothers and sisters: Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through man, the resurrection of the dead came also through man. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. When everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all.

Jesus said to his disciples: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. The king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' The righteous will say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' They will say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to you?' He will answer, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Excerpts from Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17; Psalm 23:1-6; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26-28; and Matthew 25:31-46

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for November 26th, the feast of Christ the King, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel from Matthew is the last section from

chapter 25, where Jesus has been telling his disciples parables explaining what the kingdom of heaven will be like. This time he tells them, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, all the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. To the sheep, on his right, he will say, 'Come, inherit the kingdom prepared for you. For I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me. Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.' To the goats on his left he will say, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire. What you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.'"

The other readings also refer to the Lord tending his sheep like a shepherd, the coming of Christ and his kingdom, and his people dwelling with the Lord forever. In the first reading from Ezekiel, thus says the Lord: "I will look after my sheep as a shepherd tends his flock. I will pasture my sheep, I will give them rest. I will judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats." Psalm 23 exclaims, "The Lord is my shepherd. In verdant pastures he gives me repose, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come." In the second reading, from the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "in Christ all shall be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the first fruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father."

The feast of Christ the King is the last Sunday in the liturgical year. The following Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent. This king we celebrate, who in today's readings is likened to a shepherd and a judge, "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet," says Paul. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Then the Son will be subjected to the Father who subjected everything to him."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!