

Christ the King, Year A

Shepherd me, O Lord. Hold me close to Your heart in these difficult times; bind up my wounds, heal my brokenness, remind me of Your promises. May I grow ever closer to You under the direction of my pastor.

While it would be very fitting to end the liturgical year on a note of triumph, power and glory for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, we actually end with the image of the shepherd who lovingly cares for his flock.

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

Ezekiel was a priest and of all the prophets, he was the most interested in the temple and the liturgy. He was called while in exile in Babylon in 597 BC, the first prophet to receive the call to prophecy outside the Holy Land, and he foretold the destruction of the temple which turned out to be a real shock to the people when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it in 587 BC. Called the “Father of Judaism,” his influence on the religion of the Jews after the exile was enormous. In chapter 33 he tells of how he was appointed a “watchman” for the people to warn them of danger and of their sins. Now in chapter 34 he speaks out against the kings who had been poor shepherds of the people and in today’s selection he announces a new type of leadership for the people when they are returned from exile. It will reverse the evils of the past kings and he focuses on God’s tenderness once they are rescued. The fullness of this prophecy comes in the person of Jesus Christ. CCC 754 tells us that “The Church is the flock of which God himself foretold that he would be the shepherd, and whose sheep, even though governed by human shepherds, are unfailingly nourished and led by Christ himself, the Good Shepherd and Prince of Shepherds, who gave his life for his sheep.”

11 Thus says the Lord God: I myself will look after and tend my sheep. When the prophet uses the phrase: “Thus says the Lord God:” it means that what he is saying is a solemn and important announcement. The use of “I” eleven times gives us a very intimate and personal picture of God who will care for us.

12 As a shepherd tends his flock when he finds himself among his scattered sheep, so will I tend my sheep. I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark. “they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark” refers to difficult times.

15 I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest, says the Lord God.

16 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.

17 As for you, my sheep, says the Lord God, I will judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats. “Between one sheep and another” is the involvement of individual responsibility.

1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Paul started the church in Corinth on his second journey in 50 A.D. On his third journey, he heard very disquieting things about the community and so he wrote this letter to the Corinthians in 56 A.D. from Ephesus. One of the problems was that they denied a bodily resurrection. Paul answers them in Chapter 15 of which this is a part. Paul goes on to tell how history will end. The beginning of the end was the resurrection, when Christ ushered in the new age in which we are living. The day is coming when death itself will be powerless and the risen Christ will hand over to the Father the harvest of his great work of redemption.

Brothers and sisters:

20 Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. The Law of Moses called for a feast to be held 7 weeks after the first cereals were harvested. These first fruits were presented to God to consecrate the entire harvest. The resurrection of Jesus is like this in that he was first but all will follow.

21 For since death came through man, the resurrection of the dead came also through man.

²²For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, Because of Adam's disobedience, we suffer death. Because of Christ's obedience, we will rise from the dead.

²³but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; Although Paul only refers to the resurrection of the just in this verse, elsewhere he speaks of the resurrection of all mankind, which has always been the teaching of the Church.

²⁴then 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. When sin and death are destroyed, he will turn the kingdom over to the Father. The death of the world will mean the death of death itself.

²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. When Pius XI instituted this feast of Christ the King, he pointed out that "He must reign in our minds...in our wills...in our hearts...and in our bodies."

²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

²⁸When 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. This is a reference to Christ, the obedient Son, who hands over to the Father the completed task he was sent to accomplish. Paul sees Jesus as subordinate to the Father in his perfect obedience to the Father's will, which accomplishes the work that the Father gave him to do, but does NOT imply that Jesus was not God.

Matthew 25:31-46

Matthew began the public ministry of Christ with the Beatitudes, setting up the list of the blessed. Here at the end of his public ministry he calls those "blessed by my Father" who comfort, console, feed or clothe those he already declared blessed. This is like a frame of the public ministry of Jesus. Chapter 24 focuses on the return of Jesus at an unknown hour. Chapter 25, which are reading today, focuses on what his followers are to do until he comes.

Jesus said to his disciples:

³¹"When the son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, Note that ALL the angels will come with Jesus for he is center of the angelic world and the angels belong to him: CCC331: Although Christ is present in his Church, his reign is nevertheless yet to be fulfilled "with power and great glory by the king's return to earth. This reign is still under attack by the evil powers even though they have been defeated definitively by Christ's Passover. That is why Christians pray, above all in the Eucharist, to hasten Christ's return.

³²and 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. This description sounds like a fulfillment of Daniel 7:13-14: "I saw one like a son of man coming on the clouds of heaven; when he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, he received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed." At the General Judgment at the end of history, Christ will come again and there will be a general resurrection of all people before his throne to be blessed or cursed according to their deeds.

³³He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. This parable does not center so much on "who are sheep" and "who are goats" as it does on the certainty that there are sheep and there are goats and the two WILL BE SEPARATED! This is really more of a warning that a verdict.

³⁴Then 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.

³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, One of the principal distinctions between the Old Testament and the New was the

scope of the teachings. In the OT they were to care for their own. In the NT where the blood shed on Calvary broke down the wall between Jews and Gentiles, they are to care for all.

36naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ The word that was used for “prison” at the time of Christ came from a root word that meant “isolation.” CCC 544 tells us that Jesus identified himself with the poor of every kind and that he makes active love toward them the **CONDITION FOR ENTERING HIS KINGDOM.**

37Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?’

38When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?

39When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’

40And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.’ St. Teresa of Avila, a Doctor of the Church, wrote that the farther advanced you are in loving your neighbor, the greater your love for God because he rewards the first with the second. Jesus announced the judgment of the Last Day in his preaching. 1) The conduct of each one and 2) the secrets of hearts will be brought to light. Those who counted the offer of God’s grace as nothing will be condemned. Our attitude about our neighbor will disclose acceptance or refusal of grace and divine love and then as Jesus said: Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.” Christ Jesus is present in many ways to his Church: in his word, in his Church’s prayer, “where two or three are gathered in my name,” in the poor, the sick and the imprisoned, in the sacraments, in the sacrifice of the Mass, in the person of the minister, but most especially in the Eucharistic species. (CCC1373) CCC1397 says that “The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, **WE MUST RECOGNIZE CHRIST IN THE POOREST, HIS BRETHREN.**”

41Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

42For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,

43a 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.’

44Then 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?’

45He 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.’ The Last Judgment will reveal even to its furthest consequences the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life. St. Augustine explains it: “When God comes, he will turn to those at his left hand and say, ‘I placed my poor little ones on earth for you. I as their head was seated in heaven at the right hand of my Father-but on earth my members were suffering, my members on earth were in need. If you gave anything to my members, what you gave would reach their Head. Would that you had known that my little ones were in need when I placed them on earth for you and appointed them your stewards to bring your good works into my treasury. But you have placed nothing in their hands; therefore you have found nothing in my presence.’”

46And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” This “eternal punishment” is called “hell” and those that go there choose to be excluded from communion with God and the blessed.

Some of this material is taken from the Saint Joseph Edition of “The New American Bible,” the “Workbook for Lectors and Gospel Readers” by Aelred Rosser, the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible “The Gospel of Matthew,” & “The Jerome Biblical Commentary.”

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.