

2020 FEAST OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,  
KING OF THE UNIVERSE, A Cycle

Today is the feast of **Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe**. The feast was established by Pius XI in 1925. The Pope was responding to some of the destructive forces of his age: like communism, fascism and the narcissism & decadence of the roaring 20's. He sensed that the people of the world needed a center & a leader who was better than the party, the führer or money.

It was originally on the last Sunday of October but it was moved to the last Sunday of the year in 1969. That's pretty new, in church years, but there are other, more ancient feasts that celebrate Christ as King or leader: Epiphany in the Christmas season and Ascension in the Easter season.

The readings today are a powerful reminder of how we are called and empowered to resist evil and bring healing to the destructive forces of our time.

**First Reading:** Ezechiel 34:11-12, 15-17(I myself will pasture my sheep and give them rest)

**Responsorial Psalm** (Psalm 23) "The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want."

**Second Reading:** 1 Corinthians 15:20-29, 28 (Christ has been raised from the dead)

**Gospel:** Matthew 25:31-46 (What ever you did for one of the least brothers & sisters of mine, you did for me)

♪ *Like a Shepherd he feeds his flock and gathers the lambs in his arms.*

*Holding them carefully close to his heart, leading them home.*

*I myself will shepherd them, for others have led them astray.*

*The lost I will rescue and heal their wounds and pasture them giving them rest.* ♪

The song sets words from today's first reading to music. Ezekiel talks about how God will be a shepherd for the people of his time, and our own. The reading follows the prophet's strong words about leaders who serve themselves rather than the people they lead. [They are the ones at the end of the reading who are called "the sleek and the strong"] He tells them that God does not approve & that the Lord will replace them as the one shepherd.

The beautiful Responsorial Psalm sings about the nourishing love of the Lord who is my Shepherd. Today is the feast of *Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe* – the one who calls himself the Good Shepherd, but the Gospel is more about the sheep, the followers of this leader and the kingdom we are called to build when we pray, "Thy Kingdom Come."

Today's Gospel tells a story of sheep who act like the true Shepherd of Ezekiel and the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23. The ones who feed the hungry, care for the sick, welcome the stranger, and befriend the incarcerated are acting like Christ who – as Paul writes – is alive among us.

The basic scene in today's Gospel would have been familiar to 1st century farmers: The sheep and goats grazed together all day, but had to be separated at night, because the goats needed more shelter from the cold than the sheep & were a lot more independent.

I always felt sorry for the goats & had trouble understanding why they represented the ones who messed up, who missed the point of the Gospel message. The symbolism would have been clearer in the culture of 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel.

[Goats in the 1<sup>st</sup> century were often used as symbols of pagan gods or even the devil. They were symbols of shame]



Sometimes symbols need to be adjusted  
best images I found for this scene come  
*Parables of Liberation*, a book written in  
Jordan. & Bill Lane Doulos. The book  
separates the **cows**

They are still symbols, but these  
make more sense to me for our time.



to different times. The  
from *Cotton Patch*  
1976 by Clarence  
describes a farmer who  
from the **hogs**.



Clarence and his wife, Florence, were the founders of Koinonia Farm in Georgia - an **inter-racial** community attempting to live like the Christians described in the Acts of the Apostles. It began in 1942, and, among other things, started Habitat for Humanity. The community endured violence & opposition over the years but still exists. [you can google it at [www.koinoniafarm.org](http://www.koinoniafarm.org).]

In the parable the sheep (or cows) represent the ones who decided to care for those in need. The goats (or pigs) represent those who ignored the need, even when they could have responded. The passage applies to nations and communities as well as individuals, as we hear that “*all the nations will be assembled before the Son of Man.*”

The Gospel for today gives me hope and reveals my own imperfections at the same time. I have tried to live my life by doing what I could to act like the sheep in that parable. I work at living and preaching the call to **be Christ for others**, to be the love of Jesus for the people God puts in my life, and to **see Christ in others**, especially the ones society neglects or rejects – but I cannot do it perfectly.

The sheep in the Gospel story were **as surprised as the goats** when the king said, “I was hungry or thirsty or homeless and you cared for me.” They were not necessarily thinking of God or Christ, they simply saw a need and they responded. The ones who will be blest in our time are not necessarily conscious believers in Christ.

This Gospel has had consequences in my own life and in each of our lives. It also challenges the choices and priorities of a family, a parish, a community or a nation.

To reach out to care for someone in need usually costs something. In the six examples in the story, 3 involve some **thing** – food, water, clothing. But the other three focus more on time – time spent welcoming someone who is away from home or different; time spent in visiting someone in prison or caring for someone who is sick. And there is often no warning for when we will be called to meet Christ through another’s need. It’s often an interruption. The Cotton patch reflection on this Gospel says, “*True mercy doesn’t ask for limits, it only asks for opportunity.*”

I remember when I moved into an apartment on Grove St. in 2014. I had to move from my house by the creek because of Hurricane Irene in 2011 but had spent almost 3 years in different borrowed lodgings.

We had just moved the furniture into my living room and we were finishing our first prayer meeting when a woman came to the door. She said her husband was sick & she needed a roll of toilet paper. At the time there was no store in the village that had it, & she didn’t have transportation to Cobleskill. I immediately thought of the Gospel for today & knew I had what she needed, so I gave her *two* rolls. In spite of the fact that I am not always able to meet all her needs, we continued a relationship which lasts to this day. The interruption of our prayer meeting became our prayer.

Responding to the needs of others also exposes our limits. Sometimes we do not have what someone is asking for – whether it is a thing or time. We cannot respond to every mailing, phone call or request for help – and some of them are scams - so we each must seek to discern what God is calling us to do. Sometimes we have to say no to a specific request, and can only listen and pray, giving the gift of time and presence, & perhaps a referral [to the Joshua project or a food pantry].



The call for us on this feast is to SEE Christ in others, and to BE Christ for others. In order to do that, we need to **receive** the love of Christ. Sometimes it is very difficult to admit my own need to be fed or visited or welcomed. Then we need to be reminded that those who care for **my** needs are meeting Christ **in me**. It's humbling to admit I sometimes have difficulty admitting that I am that vulnerable.

Even before we are aware of it, we meet Christ in our family, & are called to be Christ for them. Something to think about as we get ready for Thanksgiving, even if it means not gathering as a large family group in order to protect those we love from getting sick. Wearing a mask is a way of caring for the least of the sisters & brothers of Christ, even before we recognize him in the ones we are protecting.

The Scripture today focuses on sheep and goats and shepherds, but it is really about God's gift of love. Today's feast asks us some challenging questions: Is Christ the King of your heart? Do you trust him enough as your shepherd & King to follow him and imitate the way he lives, loves and leads? Do we believe deeply enough to bear the cross of caring and to risk rejecting the behavior of those who seem only to care about themselves?

And what if the call to see Christ in others and be Christ for others were heard by communities, and states and nations? They would not even have to name Christ, the Gospel says, just care for those in need. Then the words we will hear in the "*Preface*" for today's Mass would begin to come true in our world: As King, Jesus presents to his Father "*an eternal and universal kingdom: a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.*"

In today's feast, we are invited by that prayer go beyond our individual and family lives and see Christ at work in the world, even the world as it is today.

What would happen if more people chose to care for the common good – like the nurses & doctors who risk their lives to care for the victims of this pandemic?

What would happen if we were alert for every opportunity to feed the hungry and welcome the stranger?

What would happen if we worked harder for immigration reform, caring for the environment, lessening violence – in short, for justice, love and peace in whatever little way we can, even as we say the words "*Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?*"

If Christ is to be honored as our King, we need to put him at the center of our lives & work to follow him as our leader as we work to build his Kingdom in our world.

The love we **want** to give to others is not enough, we are called to give the love of *Christ* to the world, & in order to do that we need to receive that love as a gift, often through the very ones I reach out to love. That is why we celebrate Eucharist as a parish family each weekend – taking time to listen to God's word and to receive the very body & life of Christ. By doing this, we are formed into a community which responds to people in need, even before we are conscious that we are meeting Christ in them.

I'd like to end with a prayer from the latest encyclical from Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* [in Italian] meaning – **All are family**. The title is taken from the words of St. Francis in one of his admonitions which begins "*Let us all look to the Good Shepherd who suffered the passion of the cross to save his sheep.*"



O God, Trinity of love, from the profound communion of your divine life, pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love. Grant us the love reflected in the actions of Jesus, in his family of Nazareth, and in the early Christian community. Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel, discovering Christ in each human being, recognizing him crucified in the sufferings of the abandoned and forgotten of our world, and risen in each brother or sister who makes a new start. Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty, reflected in all the peoples of the earth, so that we may discover anew that all are important and all are necessary, different faces of the one humanity that God so loves. Amen.

[Conclusion to the Prayer of the Faithful - Prayer from Fratelli Tutti of Pope Francis]

Lord, Father of our human family,  
you created all human beings equal in dignity:  
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit  
and inspire in us  
a dream of renewed encounter, dialogue, justice and  
peace.  
Move us to create healthier societies and a more  
dignified world,  
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.  
May our hearts be open to all the peoples and nations  
of the earth.  
May we recognize the goodness and beauty  
that you have sown in each of us,  
and thus forge bonds  
of unity, common projects, and shared dreams. Amen.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCweI32w8ZI&t=4s> Link to homily by Fr. Scott VanDerveer for the Feast of Christ the King *"I need all the help I can give"*