

Christ the King A Cycle 2014

The feast of Christ the King was established in 1925 to be celebrated on the last Sunday of October. It was moved to the last Sunday of the year in 1969. That's pretty new, in church years, but it's not the only feast that celebrates Christ as King. Two others would be *Epiphany* and *Ascension*.

First Reading: Ezekiel 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 takes words from today's first reading.

Ezekiel talks about how God will be a shepherd for the people of his time, and our own.

The Responsorial Psalm sings about the nourishing love of the Good Shepherd.

Jesus, later on, would say, "I am the good shepherd."

The Gospel tells a story of sheep who act like the Shepherd of Ezekiel and Psalm 23.

The ones who imitate the love and caring of the Good Shepherd.

Anyone who feeds the hungry, cares for the sick, welcomes the stranger, and befriends someone in prison is acting like Christ who – as Paul writes – is risen from the dead and 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, and were a lot more independent. In the parable the sheep represent the ones who decided to care for the ones they met. The goats represent those who ignored the need, even when they could have responded.

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*, to recognize Jesus in each of my sisters & brothers – but I cannot do it perfectly, and I do not have any love that I have not first received from God, often through the very ones I reach out to love.

I thought of today's Gospel last Tuesday, as I was watching NCIS on TV [Nov. 18, 2014].

The story line was about a female Navy medic who saved the lives of two people at an accident she came upon in a remote area. She cared for them while waiting for help to arrive, but once it did, she was taken to jail because she was not officially certified as an EMT. Even though she had been trained as a medic and had served in a war zone and done all the right things, she had broken a human law.

She did not claim to see Christ in the people she saved from death, but neither did the sheep in the Gospel story. They were as surprised as the goats when the king said, "I was hungry or homeless and you cared for me."

They were not thinking of God or Christ, they saw a need and they responded.

And that is not just a TV plot. There are places in our own country where a person can be arrested for feeding or assisting immigrants – sometimes following God’s law goes against human law. Perhaps if Jesus were telling this story today, he might say to some members of Congress, “*I was an immigrant and you deported me.*”

This Gospel has had consequences in my *own* life. A few years ago, I was asked to visit a man who is in prison for a crime he *did* commit. At first I went in response to the request of a friend who wanted to visit, but could not, because she was working as a volunteer in another prison and was forbidden by prison regulations to visit someone who had been a part of her program.

At first, I simply wanted to act like a sheep rather than a goat. I wanted to do the right thing. However, as I made the effort to continue to visit, and to support him in what I thought were little ways, I began to receive the love of God through him – he became Christ for me. Now I consider him a friend, and look forward to when I can make the time to visit.

But this choice has been both a gift and a cross, to reach out to care for someone in need usually costs something. The most difficult thing for me was not the money I send him occasionally or what I spend for gas, or even the time that I have to spend on a weekend when I am usually working in parishes.

The most painful cross is my frustration that I cannot change the injustice of the prison system and cannot prevent my friend from being threatened by other inmates or demeaned by the ones who are part of the system.

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 by admitting my own need to be fed, or visited or welcomed.

And the love we want to give to others is not enough, we are called to give the love of *Christ* to the world, and in order to do that we need to receive that love as a gift. That is why we gather to celebrate Eucharist as a parish family each weekend – taking time to listen to God’s word and to receive the very body and lifeblood 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.

We are called to be Christ for our own families and to see Christ in them, even before we are aware of it. Something to think about as we get ready for Thanksgiving.

The weekly community dinners in this village are opportunities both share and receive the love of Christ, even before we are conscious that we are meeting him and sharing his love.

The Scripture today focuses on sheep and goats and shepherds, but it is really about God’s gift of love, and the call to see Christ in others and to be Christ for others. Today’s feast asks us some challenging questions: Is Christ the King of your heart? Do you trust him enough as your shepherd 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 going against what others are afraid of or what the culture tells us is right?

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 feast would begin to come true in our world:

In that prayer, Jesus the King 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.*” This prayer is the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, the central prayer of the Mass. But “preface” is not a good translation of the Latin. The prayer is more like an overture to an opera – where all the themes are previewed – than the preface of a book.

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 reach out to the sick in Africa who are dying from Ebola?

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 of violence – and put pressure on our elected representatives to do the same.

What would happen, in short, if we worked 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?*”

I pray today that each of us, and all of us will choose to accept Christ more fully as King and Lord of every part of our lives. I pray for myself and for you that we will be able to see Christ in others and be Christ for others each day, and each moment of our lives. I pray with you that God’s kingdom will come, that God’s will be done *in us, for us and through us.*