



**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

**Christ the King. The Sunday next before Advent**

**Gospel Reading**

**Matthew 25.31-46**

**The Judgement of the Nations**

<sup>31</sup> ‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup> and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup> And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” <sup>40</sup> And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” <sup>41</sup> Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” <sup>44</sup> Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

**Other Readings: Ezekiel 34.11-16,20-24**

**Psalms 95.1-7**

**Ephesians 1.15-23**

**Homily**

This is the last Sunday in the church year. On it we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, completing the re-telling of God’s great story that we undertake in our pattern of worship and reflection every year. Like all stories, God’s story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Today, we focus on the end. For Christians, this is the final destination of human history, the point towards which all creation is ultimately headed. It’s a destination full of joy and

wonder, but also one that is offered to us with a challenge, as we'll see. The end of God's story is the complete establishment of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. (We pray for this every time we say the Lord's Prayer.) It is the point at which Christ is acknowledged as rightful Lord and King of all.

Right away this ought to set us thinking. These days it can be difficult to imagine that the destination of human history is anything so glorious or positive. To have hope, in times like these, may seem to reflect (at best) a wilful naivety. We may even take a strange comfort in believing the worst – preferring to avoid disappointment than risk believing that things can ever get better. But today of all days we are reminded that history is in God's hands and that, because that is so, 'all shall be well'.

As our gospel reading makes clear, though, this offer of a triumphant and joyful ending for God's story comes to us with a challenge. In what is known as the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus challenges his first listeners to ask themselves whose side they are on. Those who are on God's side are recognised by their actions, and so are those who are not. Acts of simple kindness to those in need are what matters most here. Whatever we do, or don't do, to help and support those around us, Jesus takes as our response to him personally.

And this tells us something else about the Kingship of Christ. Because unlike any other monarch, or Prime Minister, or President, or whatever, the authority of Christ over everything that is or has been or ever will be wasn't won on a battlefield or in an election – it was won through sacrifice and service. Jesus gave his life for others, in two senses. He spent the time of his life on earth meeting the needs of those around him – curing the sick, delivering the oppressed, feeding the hungry, just as he challenges us to do in our turn. And in his death on the cross Jesus made it possible for us to be forgiven for our sins and to come to share in God's own eternal life.

That's a very different kind of authority, a very unusual sort of King. Although these reflections come at the end of the church year, and provide us with a vision of our final destination, they also bring us full circle, right back to the beginning of the story. Next week, on Advent Sunday, a new year begins and the story starts all over again. It begins with human beings praying in urgent need, in the words of the prophet, 'Oh that you would tear open the heavens and come down!' That prayer reflects the deep human longing for peace and justice. It also acknowledges that only God can fulfil that longing. Today, then, we rejoice that God, in Christ, *did* tear open the heavens and come down. God, in Christ, *did* give up his own life for us. And God, in Christ, *will* bring all things to triumphant fulfilment, when the just and gentle rule of Jesus will finally be established and (as St Paul puts it) 'every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord'.

### **Conversation Questions**

1. What do you hope for in your life? What do you hope for in the world?

2. How do you think the Kingship of Jesus is different from other kinds of leadership and authority?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

### **Prayer**

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

### **Collect of the day**

Eternal Father,  
whose Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven  
that he might rule over all things as Lord and King:  
keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit  
and in the bond of peace,  
and bring the whole created order to worship at his feet;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

God the Father,  
help us to hear the call of Christ the King  
and to follow in his service,  
whose kingdom has no end;  
for he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, one glory.

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