

Commentary on Sunday Scripture

Solemnity of Christ the King

First reading:

(Ezekiel 34.11-12, 15-17)

The Loving Shepherd

Is this really an appropriate reading for the Feast of Christ the King? All about sheep? Shouldn't it be about crowns, medals, processions and majesty? No, it should not!

Christ's Kingship is modelled on God's Kingship, or rather, Jesus came to show us what God's Kingship is. 'The Kingship of God has come upon you', was his first proclamation.

In the British countryside, we can usually leave the sheep to graze on their own. In the hilly country of Palestine, there is always a shepherd to look after them, to stop them wandering over a cliff or stave off attack from wild animals. Sheep are silly creatures, can be guaranteed to wander, wide eyed and gormless, in front of a passing car and then run the wrong way. We are silly creatures, too, and do just the same. We need God's care to keep us on the right path.

Jesus as the Good Shepherd cherishes us, guards us, heals us, calms our fears, and even gives his life for us. That is what his Kingship is.

Question:

What can I do to make Christ's Kingship more a reality in the world?

Second reading:

(1 Corinthians 15.20-26, 28)

King Jesus Presents the Kingdom

What will happen at the end of the world? How will the world be brought to an end? We simply do not know, and it is not the sort of thing the Bible needs to teach us.

For us Christians, three things are certain - and this is what Paul teaches us here in vivid picture language.

First, God's sovereignty will extend over the whole of creation in peace and harmony.

Second, this will be through Christ's work of mediation, for Christ is Lord of the Church, the 'backbone' of the Church which is his Body. When Paul says 'he has put all his enemies under his feet', he is quoting a messianic Psalm about the priest-king of Jerusalem, frequently applied to Jesus.

Third, Christ is the first fruits of the Resurrection: where he has led the way, we are to follow.

Question:

What does this reading tell us of the relationship of Father to Son?

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Gospel:

(Matthew 25.31-46)

The Last Judgment

This is the last of Matthew's great parables. The world is finally divided into 'goodies' and 'baddies'. The great dramatic scene here depicted will not necessarily happen all at once, but we shall each of us at the moment of death face the judgment of our divine Lord in his glory.

This confrontation will be an experience far more awesome and shattering than any description can express, and yet fulfilling and reassuring. We will know at last in a naked way our own filth and also our own infinite value to this transcendent figure.

Two striking points are stressed in the parable. First, we will be judged uniquely on our treatment of those in any kind of need. Not on our prayer life. Not on our asceticism or penances undertaken. Only on our respect for others, how far we look to see what they need and what we can give.

Each of the ten commandments in the Old Testament, each of the eight beatitudes in the New can be resolved into this: telling the truth, financial honesty, honouring father and mother (or children), hunger for justice, peace making. The second striking point is the reason for the first: that Christ is in each person. What we do to others, we do to Christ.

Question:

What does it really mean that Christ is in me and all other people?
