

34th Sun — Christ the King (A)

22nd November 2014

‘King and Judge’

Ezek 34: *I myself will pasture my sheep* Ps 22: *the Lord's my shepherd*

1Cor 15: Christ will hand over the kingdom to the Father

Mt 25: 31–46: Christ on throne of glory, separating sheep and goats

We keep this last Sunday of the Church's year, as you know, as a celebration of Jesus Christ as Universal King. The readings of the Mass paint a wonderful picture of the Lord in His majesty, in all sorts of different lights:

1. In the 1st reading the prophet Ezekiel shows God as a shepherd, acting for His people in coming to tend them personally, and no longer leaving that in the hands of other leaders and kings. But, at the end, we are reminded that He is also judge: “I will judge between sheep and sheep ...”
2. The psalm continues the theme of shepherd-king with the famous psalm, “The Lord is my Shepherd” who tenderly leads His people to pasture: to be nourished and sustained, protected and led to safety.
3. St Paul, in the 2nd reading paints a majestic picture of the heavenly glory of Christ, risen from the dead and as king with universal authority, drawing all things to Himself; drawing all things to a close, conquering death and

handing over a perfected creation to the Father.

4. And then the Gospel, the famous Gospel account from Matthew about the judgment. Jesus, the Son of Man as both King and Judge ... capturing that compassion and justice that we first heard in the opening reading too.

For Jesus to be both King and Judge too is not incompatible; in fact, it's of the essence of a King to uphold justice, to rule, and to set laws of right behaviour, and to correct those who break that rule of law. We can't imagine God as anything other than loving and forgiving; but at the same time we can't imagine Him in any other way than also judging us — judging us perfectly out of that same love.

When Jesus judges us, of course, it is with a perfect knowledge of us. Human courts and trials often work in the dark; motives aren't understood, the whole picture isn't seen, the influences and pressures are not all perceived. Miscarriages of justice are commonplace; just as is the opportunity for people to get away with wrongdoing unpunished, if they are particularly crafty. But when God judges — thankfully — we know that the truth, the whole

truth, and nothing but the truth is the only criterion for His judgment ... He knows all things; He sees our efforts, He sees us as we really are. We shall stand before His throne of majesty and be judged according to how we loved God and neighbour.

In this Gospel account Jesus places before us something of an examination of conscience — a love for neighbour, on which we shall indeed be judged. We are not judged solely on what wrong we have done, but also on what ‘right’ we have neglected to do. And this account of Jesus of our personal judgment after death is a strong teaching on this. Did we: (i) feed the hungry; (ii) give drink to the thirsty; (iii) welcome the stranger; (iv) clothe the naked; (v) visit the sick; (vi) visit the imprisoned? In Catholic tradition we call these actions the ‘corporal works of mercy’ — we are duty bound as Christians to exercise these works of charity. Let’s just reflect on them, and remind ourselves of this teaching of Jesus:

1. ***Feed the hungry***: do we care for and feed carefully, our children? any elderly parents? make sure an elderly or housebound neighbour has his/her shopping?

2. ***Give drink to the thirsty***: do we have a care for the needy in the world? Do we give something to charity that will help the poorest, who may not even yet have running water in their village?
3. ***Welcome the stranger***: do we look out for those who seem to have no-one to talk to, maybe a new member of our parish? or a new neighbour, particularly if they live alone?
4. ***Clothe the naked***: do we have a care for the homeless, finding some charitable way to give fruitfully to those who for whatever reason are down on their luck?
5. ***Visit the sick***: are we diligent in making sure that the sick and frail are visited, whether in hospital or at home? Who do we know of who is sick? Have we seen them yet? Have we at least phoned them up? Some might profess a certain phobia for hospitals, but we should overcome that in favour of the love and duty we have for those who are sick.
6. ***Visit the imprisoned***: maybe that’s a less likely scenario, but staying in touch even with those who have committed offences is often a very valuable part of their rehabilitation.

As we reflect on these works of mercy, I'm sure that many others might occur to us: ways that we ought not to neglect. It might seem a far cry from the glory of our heavenly king to a reflection on feeding, homelessness and imprisonment ... but Our Lord entered this world precisely to get His sacred hands dirty, so to speak: and so should we. Our perfect Lord and King stooped down from heaven to tend the weak and poor, and so should we. He will judge us on it, and raise us up to heaven if we have done so!