Readings and Reflections for the Week

SUNDAY 22 November - OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE
Reading 1, Ezekiel 34:11-12,15-17
Psalm 22(23), Reading 2, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28
Gospel, Matthew25:31-46
I was naked and you clothed me; sick and you visited me

Monday 23 November – Feria
Reading 1, Revelation 14:1-5, Psalm 23(24)
Gospel, Luke 21:1-4
The widow's mite

Tuesday 24 November – St Andrew Dũng-Lạc and Companions, Martyrs
Reading 1, Revelation 14:14-19, Psalm 95(96)
Gospel, Luke 21:5-11
The destruction of the Temple foretold

Wednesday 25 November – Feria
Reading 1, Revelation 15:1-4, Psalm 97(98)
Gospel, Luke 21:12-19
Your endurance will win you your lives

Thursday 26 November – Feria
Reading 1, Revelation 18:1-2,21-23,19:1-3,9
Psalm 99(100), Gospel, Luke 21:20-28
There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars

Friday 27 November – Feria
Reading 1, Revelation 20:1-4,11-21:2, Psalm 83(84)
Gospel, Luke 21:29-33
My words will never pass away

Saturday 28 November – Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Reading 1, Revelation 22:1-7, Psalm 94(95)
Gospel, Luke 21:34-36
That day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap

SUNDAY 29 November - FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Reading 1, Isaiah 63:16-17,64:1,3-8
Psalm 79(80), Reading 2, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Gospel, Mark 13:33-37
If he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep

United with Churches together in St Albans we pray for all members of Christ Church.

SAINT OF THE WEEK St Andrew Dũng-Lạc, Priest, and Companions
Fr Andrew Dung-Lac, was born with the name Dung An-Tran to a poor, ordinary family in northern Vietnam around the year 1795. The family followed the traditional religion of their land. But when An-Tran was 12, his family moved to Hanoi to look for work. There the boy met a Christian, a catechist who housed him and taught him about the Lord and Saviour of mankind. The boy was baptized with the name Andrew. In 1823, Andrew was ordained a priest, and his preaching and simplicity of life led many others to baptism. But it was a dangerous time to be a Christian in Vietnam. In 1832, the Emperor Minh-Mang banned foreign missionaries and commanded Vietnamese Christians to trample on crucifixes in order publically to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ. Many would not. Love made the faithful creative, and they hid priests in caves or sometimes in their houses, risking and often giving their lives in horrible ways. Fr Andrew was first arrested in 1835, but his parishioners ransomed him. He changed his last name to Lac and moved to a different region to avoid persecution, but persecution followed him.
In 1839, he was arrested again along with another Vietnamese priest, Fr Peter Thi, whom Fr Andrew had visited in order to go to confession. The two were ransomed, then arrested again, tortured and finally beheaded in Hanoi on 21 December 1839. Other waves of persecution followed Fr Andrew's death, just as they had preceded it. Indeed, the Vietnamese faithful were subjected to some of the cruellest forms of martyrdom in the history of Christianity. Christians had the words "ta dao," or "false religion," written across their faces. They were stripped of their belongings and families, and subjected to diabolical forms of torture. Christian villages were destroyed. But the baptized members of the Body of Christ in the land of Vietnam knew the voice of their Shepherd too well to betray Him.
What the rulers of the land did to wipe out the Church, the Spirit of God used to give the Church deep and lasting roots among the Vietnamese people. By the end of the 20th century, Catholics were estimated at 10% of the Vietnamese population.
When Fr Andrew Dung-Lac and the Vietnamese martyrs – the 117 named and the hundreds of thousands unnamed – were canonized in 1988, the communist government of Vietnam did not permit a single representative from that country to attend. But 8,000 Vietnamese Catholics from the diaspora were there, filled with joy to be the children of this suffering Church.

Prayer: O God, source and origin of all fatherhood, who kept the Martyrs Saint Andrew Dung-Lac and his companions faithful to the Cross of your Son, even to the shedding of their blood, grant, through their intercession, that, spreading your love among our brothers and sisters, we may be your children both in name and in truth. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Reading 1, Ezekiel 34:11-12,15-17
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; they 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.

What does it mean to you to proclaim the kingship of Christ? How may we model our lives on that kingship?

Reading 2, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28
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 picturelanguage. Firstly, God's sovereignty will extend over the whole of creation in peace and harmony. Secondly, this will be through Christ's work of mediation, for Christ is Lord 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, the new priest-king of creation. Thirdly, Christ is the first-fruits of the resurrection: where he has led the way, we are to follow.

How would you explain the resurrection of the dead? What words and images would you use?

Gospel, Matthew 25:31-46
This is the last of Matthew's great parables. The world is finally divided into 'goodies' and 'baddies'. The great dramatic scene here depicted is that of the Final Judgement of all, but we shall each of us at the moment of death face the judgement 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 re-assuring. We will know at last in a naked way our own sin and also our own infinite value before the transcendent figure of the Lord. Two striking points are stressed in the parable. Firstly, we will be judged uniquely on our treatment of those in any kind of need. Not first of all on our prayer-life; not on our asceticism; not on penances undertaken; but on our respect for others - how far we look to see what they need and what we can give. The ten commandments of the Old Testament, the eight beatitudes of the New can be summarised in this way: speak the truth, be honest (including financially), honour father and mother (or children), hunger for justice, make peace. 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.

What does it mean that Jesus is in all other people, especially the stranger, the sick, the comfortless, even those in prison? How does this teaching of Jesus change my attitude to people I despise or avoid or just ignore?

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