

22 Nov 20

Solemnity of Christ the King (A)

Homily

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

I Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Matthew 25:31-46

There are two images of leadership that come from the readings today. One, is that of king. If you have ever been to the Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, in Washington DC, you know what I am talking about. You have seen the giant mosaic over the main altar, titled "Christ, Pantokrator". The fancy word means, "Lord of the Universe". To get the full effect, you have to go and stand under the huge Mosaic, and look up at it. It is scary! The words of The Battle Hymn of the Republic come to mind: "O be swift my soul to answer him, be jubilant my feet!" It feels like an experience of the Last Judgment.

The other image of leadership arising out from the readings today is that of Shepherd. I have not seen many shepherds. Nine years ago, when visiting Maryland, my friend, Lisa, took my other friend Bob, and I to Lost and Found Horse Rescue, in Germantown, MD. It is a great place that rescues equines from abuse and slaughter. We went to visit not the horses, but the donkeys! It was the closest I will ever get to being a shepherd. As the donkeys saw us over the hill, one brayed, and all the others—about 15—came to us. The three of us and the site manager were surrounded with loving animals, gentle, strong creatures, seeking attention and petting.

There is a revelation in Ezekiel that God is keeping his eyes on leaders. Kings in the Old Testament were called on to be like shepherds, showing concern for all the people, not only the influential. Think of our own nation. All the people would like the President to be aware of their situation in life, right? So, as God sees it, kings of Israel who were partial to the powerful, deficient, and self-centered could be replaced.

In the gospel story today, the King—Jesus—judges as a different sort of king. He is not interested in money, or investing, as was last week's ruler. Christ appears as king and shepherd of the tired, the poor, the needy and forgotten people who didn't receive the necessary attention and help they desired. As with Ezekiel, there is an intimate connection between the king and the unfortunate person.

In modern times we have connected Christ the King to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Christ is King because of his Resurrection. The second reading from 1 Corinthians bears this out. The statue or picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus indicates that he is alive, yet bears the wounds that brought about his death. So, it is an image of the Risen Christ, who has conquered death.

We don't have a king in our church or nation, but in the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Jesus is called the King of our hearts. How does Jesus become King of our Hearts? Years ago, in this part of the Diocese, there was a devotion set up in the family home, to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It was—actually, still is—called the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the Home. Has anyone had this special event done in your home? [pause] Outsiders would see the celebration as only the placing of a picture of Jesus on the wall. But, to those in the know, the picture, or statue, was placed in a prominent space in the home, a space dedicated to Christ the King. Prayer, study, and faith-sharing would occur within the family, in that space.

No one wants to face the fact that one hour of prayer and worship a week is nowhere near enough to compete with 167 hours away from church, community, and very often, God. No one wants to face the fact that God wants much more from us as adults than he wanted from us when we were children. No one wants to face the fact that we prefer to keep God in the parish church when we leave than to take him home, and still be seen as faithful disciples. No one wants to face the fact that we have fewer holy pictures, bibles and statues in the home, compared to the homes of our parents and grandparents.

Despite our valuable presence here together, we have found ways to God-proof our homes and family life, perhaps unknowingly. Christ the King will not bust down your door, but only gently knocks. He seeks to be King of our hearts, which happens by letting him in. The Good Shepherd needs more than an hour a week to look after his flock.

It is time to bring back the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the Home. It may need to be brushed off and updated a bit. In addition to the rosary, it is another way of the family praying together and staying together. I have decided to work on bringing this ceremony back into our midst. There are a few Sacred Hearts priests to help. Stay tuned for upcoming attractions.

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