

34th Sun — Christ the King (A)

26th November 2023

‘Jesus, humble King & 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

Almost before we know it, we're coming rather quickly towards the end of term, the end of the Church's year, and the end of 2023. We keep this last Sunday of the Church's year in uplifting celebration of *Jesus Christ as Universal King*. In this year in England when we've had the splendour of a King's coronation — perhaps you followed the beautiful ceremony on TV or online back in May — we have our own vision, perhaps, of what a monarch might mean; the pageant, the splendour, the massed troops, bands, horses, carriages ... just the sheer colour and sound of it all. Monarchist or no, it's an awesome and uplifting sight. But we also know that a King can never be merely pomp and ceremonial; monarchy must be combined with real public concern — our own King shows this in all sorts of ways, thankfully, including on environmental issues: on his 75th birthday the other day, for example, he took the opportunity to launch a scheme for drastically cutting food

waste, the level of which can be a real scandal in a country where all too many are having to resort to Foodbanks. Our only *canonized* English king, Edward the Confessor, who reigned in the 11th c., was renowned for his piety but also for his care for the poor. A famous English priest of the 20th c., a former university chaplain at Oxford, Mgr Ronald Knox, said this of St Edward the Confessor in a sermon:

“... in his simple piety, in the unaffected generosity of his nature, he set himself to serve the men about him by easing their burdens, by relieving their necessities, by confirming them in their allegiance to the faith. ... He might have altered the dynastic history of England, have left us different manners and a different political constitution, if he had been other than he was. ... The Confessor, whose ambitions could be satisfied by finding a poor man his dinner, saw no corruption in death, and lives the patron of his fellow countrymen.”

This *can be* the nature of kingship, when sought in holiness.

The readings of this Mass of *Christ the King* paint a wonderful picture of the Lord in His majesty, in all sorts of different lights. The Gospel, in particular, is the famous

parable in Mt 25 (the 3rd of the *trptych* of parables we've heard on recent Sundays) about the Last Judgment, portraying Jesus, the divine Son of Man, as both King and Judge ... capturing that essence of *compassion and justice*. 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.

I would really suggest that you re-read and savour this Gospel reading today ([Mt 25](#): 31-46); do take away with you today the Mass sheet that have the readings on. It's a powerful text: Jesus's very own words as King & Judge, reminding us of what we sometimes refer to as the 'corporal works of mercy' that are a key part of how we shall be judged. The significance of Jesus's parable about the end of time is that these matters are *not peripheral, or optional*. We must have in our minds and in our hearts these Christian imperatives: Jesus's foundation of Christianity makes an insistent call that we diligently perform works of mercy, for all. The Church usually lists

the 'seven corporal works of mercy' as follows: to (i) feed the hungry; (ii) give drink to the thirsty; (iii) clothe the naked; (iv) welcome the stranger; (v) visit the sick; (vi) visit the imprisoned; and (vii) bury the dead. All but the last one of these come from our Lord's parable today about 'separating the sheep from the goats' ('the blessed from the wicked'). Before we enter Advent in a week's time — our preparation for a time of Christmas *giving* — it would be good to think about the charitable demands that are made on us by our faith, ... i.e. by *Jesus*. Do we "*feed the hungry*" etc.? What ways do we find, regularly, to carry out these works of mercy? "**Feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty**" starts at home, with hospitality to one another; it continues with our regular help to the local homeless men and women on the street — for example, through our Newman House Wednesday SVP Soup Run, or at St Patrick's Soho. It acquires a greater significance when we remember our starving brothers and sisters in war-torn and famine-ridden zones. We have many many ways of giving to *bona fide* charities that work

to relieve hunger and poverty — as I do, with a Standing Order to a [London homelessness charity](#) founded by the Sisters of Mercy. Our own Catholic agency for overseas development, “[CaFOD](#),” does great work in this area, and makes one of its key efforts the access to clean, reliable drinking water. What about “**clothing the naked**” and “**welcoming the stranger**”? Well, I have to say that last spring you were immediately very generous when it came to bringing in unwanted clothing to be sent on to a charity — if more opportunities arise of this sort, we will let you know. Such actions are so important as a practical expression of our faith. “**Visiting the sick and imprisoned**” is also asked of us, that we do not flinch from going to places where we might rather not go. Please don’t neglect your sick relatives and friends, whether in home or at hospital — they need you more than ever in their frailty. Don’t give in to the myth that it’s better to “remember them as they were”! In their fears around sickness they need the love of family and friends most especially. Is there someone in sickness, at home or in hospital, that you

should visit, or at least telephone, soon? Finally, to “**bury the dead**” is the one of the corporal works of mercy, too. It’s important that we give great dignity to the dying and the deceased. Don’t neglect or avoid those you know to be coming towards the end of their life. Make sure that they have all the dignity of medicine and homely comfort, and if they have need of a nursing home or hospice, be diligent about ensuring that their care is good. When they do die, make sure to guarantee them a dignified, prayerful funeral — and if they’re Catholics do all you can to ensure that their funeral is held properly in Church, within a Requiem Mass. The remains of the deceased are then to be buried — either the body buried in a grave, or the ashes after a cremation also buried, and never scattered.

This is barely scratching the surface of what we might do to live generously the ‘corporal works of mercy’ — but please, as we honour Christ the King with the recitation of His great words on Judgment in the Gospel, do let the Lord speak to your heart in regard to what you are doing, or should do extra, in these acts of mercy. Let’s

not forget ... The merciful Lord *expects* us as baptized people of faith to be merciful; and He will judge us on it! As we turn our hearts towards Advent and Christmas, soon, we might want to think of how to benefit some charities through generous giving to good causes.

Our Lord and King, Jesus Christ, has given us the perfect example of generosity and self-giving. Whilst being King of the Universe, Creator of all, yet He gives up His splendour, to stoop down to us, be amongst us, to “feed the hungry ... and visit the sick” Himself! Ezekiel announced this very thing, long before Christ appeared: “The Lord says this — ‘I am going to look after My flock Myself, and keep all of it in view’.” The very perfection of kingly majesty is that He has the common touch: He knows His people individually, He knows each of us and our needs. We gaze at our Lord and King, then, Jesus Christ, who from His throne of heavenly glory has each of us in view, each of us loved in His sacred mind. As God, He is

not turned-in on Himself, but in fact is utterly focussed on His beloved creation, His angels and saints, and wanting to bless us with everything that will help us to do His holy will. We can find such peace and joy as we contemplate the supreme figure of Jesus Christ our King. He is “the same yesterday, today, and for ever.” He is unchanging in the glory that He has revealed to us of His love and of His call to heaven. Let’s allow that image of heaven to pervade our hearts on this feast day, and renew in us our devotion to live lives pleasing to Him, our Lord and King.

A PRAYER TO CHRIST THE KING

O Lord our God, You alone are the Most Holy King and Ruler of all nations. We pray to You, Lord, in the great expectation of receiving from You, O Divine King, mercy, peace, justice and all good things.
Protect, O Lord our King, our families and the land of our birth. Guard us, we pray, Most Faithful One.
Protect us from our enemies and from Your just Judgment.
Forgive us, O Sovereign King, our sins against You.
Jesus, You are a King of Mercy. We have deserved Your just Judgment. Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.
We trust in Your Great Mercy.
O most awe-inspiring King, we bow before You and pray;
May Your Reign, Your Kingdom, be recognized on earth.
Amen.