

## The Solemnity of Christ the King

### Scripture Readings

#### **First Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17**

Thus says the Lord God: I myself will look after and tend my sheep. As a shepherd tends his flock when he finds himself among his scattered sheep, so will I tend my sheep. I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark. I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest, says the Lord God. The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy, shepherding them rightly. As for you, my sheep, says the Lord God, I will judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats.

#### **Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28**

Brothers and sisters: Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through man, the resurrection of the dead came also through man. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the first fruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. When everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be in all.

#### **Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46**

Jesus said to his disciples: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer

them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

### **Opening Prayer**

#### **Psalm 23**

**The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose.

Beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul. He guides me in right paths for his name's sake.

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.

**The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want**

**Opening Prayer for Mass: Almighty ever-living God, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of the universe, grant, we pray, that the whole creation, set free from slavery, may render your majesty service and ceaselessly proclaim your praise. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.**

### **Breaking Open the Word**

We believe that the Word of God is living and effective. That means when we read or listen to Scripture, it is Jesus who speaks to us now, in the present moment of our lives. His Living Word gives us hope, purpose and direction in our lives. As we break open these readings for this Sunday, reflect on these questions:

**What is Jesus saying to me personally that will give purpose and encouragement to me now?**

**Am I open to the way Jesus' words are living and effective in the people and world around me?**

**How will I respond to his message contained in these living words today?**

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### What Does It All Mean?

*These words of reflection are taken from **The Word of the Lord: Reflections on the Sunday Readings** by Philip J. McBrien, Twenty-Third Publications, 1995*

#### **First Reading; Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-1**

Ezekiel's chapter 34 explores images of the people of Israel as sheep, and of the various shepherds who have tended the chosen people. These verses hint at the chapter's riches. Speaking for God the prophet utters: "I will tend my sheep, as any shepherd must do when they are scattered. I will rescue them and give them rest, binding the injured and healing the sick, but destroying the sleek and the strong. I will judge between any two sheep, and between rams and goats." The rest of the chapter describes the bad leaders who have led the people into exile, and the fate of the few who have prospered at the expense of the many under those leaders. It also promises a restored covenant between God and the suffering remnant.

#### **Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28**

The epistle describes the end of the world. The end has begun. Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who sleep. When he returns, all who belong to him will be raised. After destroying all earthly powers, Christ will hand over the kingdom to the Father. We cannot disregard these words without also doing some harm to our faith. After all, Paul's thought has virtually given shape to three of our four Gospel accounts. Still, we must not worry ourselves about the end, as some do, for such a misplaced emphasis could also distort our faith. Our world will end, there will be a final judgment. Christ will welcome his elect. The accounts of the gospel that are included in our Bible are much newer than the Pauline epistles. Each evangelist has created a narrative influenced by Paul and other early Christian theologians, as well as by various traditions about Jesus and the specific needs of the local church. Paul's theology pervades the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The kingdom parables in these gospels are built upon the foundation illuminated in this epistle text. We must interpret everything through the pivotal event in history—Christ's Easter—for it is here that history's final chapter begins.

#### **Gospel: Matthew 25: 31-46**

According to Matthew, this is Jesus' concluding and climactic teaching. It describes the final judgment. The Son of Man will separate all the nations into two groups, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will give the sheep the kingdom prepared for them. They will dwell in the kingdom because when he was hungry they fed him, when he was naked they clothed him, and when he was ill they comforted him, and when he was imprisoned they visited him. They have done all these things whenever they fed, clothed, comforted, and visited "the least" of humanity. The goats will not fare so well. They have seen and

ignored Christ's hunger, nakedness, illness, and imprisonment, whenever they have turned their back on fellow human beings. The gospel's social teaching could hardly be more explicit or urgent. Matthew climaxes all of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom with a simple and challenging principle: What you do to the least of humanity, you do for me. Like the parables of the dragnet and the bridesmaids, this teaching describes a gathering. Everyone is invited to the kingdom, and up to a point everyone is included. But, in the end, only those who have conducted themselves appropriately will inherit the kingdom. Only those who have fed, clothed, comforted, and visited will earn a place. This teaching leaves no room for self-righteousness or indifference to the plight of others. It insists that we meet Christ in all other people, and it holds us to account for the ways in which we act.

*Closing Reflection and Prayer is taken from Ascend: Companion to the Sunday Readings, by Life Teen Publications, 2019*

### **Royal Roundup**

The past few weeks you have probably noticed a "shift" in the tone and content of the Sunday readings, in particular the gospels. As we've spoken about previously, the imagery has grown quite stark and the context of the readings has dealt a great deal with the coming Last Judgment. As we close this liturgical year, today's readings crescendo with this parable that so strongly urges us all to be living rightly—for the Son of Man is, indeed, coming to survey and "repay" everyone according to their conduct. We see Christ the King coming with the angels but in the role of a shepherd king, who separates sheep (righteous ones) from goats. The separation is based not on our intentions but on our actions. How often or seldom have we served another in the name of Christ? Do we seek to serve "kings" (the popular) but forget the lowly (the unpopular)? It is by our actions toward God and others that our true nature—and our true "king"—is revealed. A shepherd, though having authority over his sheep, demonstrates his great love by serving them and risking his life for them. This is an extension of the good shepherd imagery employed by the prophet Ezekiel in the first reading. We see God as proactively seeking our lost sheep, even before any judgment or separation. We are given every opportunity to be in the Lord's sheepfold. God is proactive, which is a theme we see put forth to the Corinthians. God did not leave us in our death but, rather, pursued and ransomed us through his only Son. He is the shepherd who not only seeks our lost sheep but sacrifices his life for them. He is a servant king, humble in his great power and unyielding in his pursuit and protection of us. His greatness was veiled as meekness on earth but reveals the power of his great glory—for the shepherd became the Lamb and the Lamb sits on the throne forever and ever. Amen.

**Lord God, king of my heart, someday you will come in your glory to separate the sheep from the goats. If you come while I am still on this earth, may I be put on your right side. Teach me, today, what it is that I need to do to ensure a life forever in your heavenly kingdom. Amen.**