

Christ the King Sunday, 2020

Ezekiel 34:11-17; Psalm 23; I Corinthians 15:20-26, 28; Matthew 25:31-46

Last week I mentioned that our understanding of God makes a difference in our lives. Our concept of God affects how we live. Today we celebrate Christ the King Sunday, the final Sunday in the Christian year. While we celebrate Christ as King, what kind of King Jesus is makes a difference. What kind of King and leader we understand and believe Jesus to be will affect the actions of our lives.

Our Scriptures give us a clear description of what kind of King, a Shepherd-King. In our first reading, through the prophet Ezekiel, God proclaims that he, himself, will be our shepherd.

“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.”

Our God looks after us like a good shepherd tends his flock. Our God is a loving, tending, rescuing, comforting, seeking, and healing God. Moreover, our God knows all the ways we get scattered due to the cloudy and dark days and seasons of our lives and never gives up on us. Truly God knows how the cloudy and dark days of 2020 have scattered us and God, our Good Shepherd, is with us!

King David’s familiar Psalm 23 reminds us how he understood God as Shepherd:

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul...” David could walk in the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil because he believed and understood that God was his Shepherd who was always with him and who would lead him and guide him.

Our God is a God who comes among us. God understands us and our tendencies to wander and comes along side us. He comes to us in the many and various scattered places of our lives.

What we think about God matters and affects us. What we discern about God affects our lives, what we do, how we act, and how we treat others.

Our Gospel lesson this morning describing Jesus in His glory separating the sheep and the goats in the final judgement suggests there is a deeper discernment of God, discerning the face of Jesus, especially in the most vulnerable and poor among us.

What separated the sheep from the goats was how they treated God in what Mother Teresa (Saint Teresa of Calcutta) called, “God’s distressing disguise in the poor.” To the sheep King Jesus said, “Whatever you did to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.” And to the goats he said, “Whatever you did not do it to the least of these, you did not do it to me.”

There is a story of Saint Teresa sharing what she called, “The five finger gospel.” It is the very story her mother told her when she was a little girl. Saint Teresa would take someone’s hand and as she pointed to each finger (one word per finger) would say the five words, “You Did It To Me.” (See: [MSIA | John-Roger Mother Teresa's Five Finger Gospel - YouTube](#))

St. Teresa not only discerned the love of God in Jesus, she also discerned the presence of Jesus in others, especially in the poorest of the poor. She saw the face of Christ in others and it drastically affected how she lived, what motivated her and how she treated others. Her life and love, how she understood and lived Jesus’ words changed the world and has affected millions of people.

“You Did It To Me.” When we love others, we are loving Jesus. When we serve others, we are serving Jesus. When we feed, clothes, and welcome others we are serving, clothing and welcoming Jesus.

What kind of King is Jesus? Jesus is a Shepherd-King who loved his flock so much he became a sheep, a lamb himself. As a sheep, He humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. Our Shepherd-King is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

In addition, our Shepherd-King is still present with us today. Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist, in the disguise of a wafer and wine, and in the “Distressing disguise of the poor.” Jesus is really present in our brothers and sisters in need.

Moreover, Saint Teresa understood there is a poverty that affects millions of people whether or not they have means. She called it, “The poverty of being unloved.” According to Saint Teresa, The poverty of being unloved, unwanted, and uncared for is even more painful and more difficult than material want. The poverty of being unloved is experienced by people of every tribe and nation. It is found within our families, communities, workplaces and friends.

Do we see Jesus in others? Do we see the face of Christ in our brothers and sisters? Do we understand that we can help alleviate human suffering and poverty? We can help alleviate the poverty of thirst, hunger, imprisonment, nakedness, and the poverty of being unloved. You Did It To Me.

Last week my wife had shoulder surgery. The surgery went very well, but she is in a lot of pain and her recovery will be long and arduous. Ever since I brought her back from the hospital, I have treated her with greater kindness, sensitivity, attentiveness, love and care.

She is the my best friend and wife of 34 years. Yet, I have rarely, if ever, treated her with such attention. Why? I know she is wounded. I know she is in pain. I know she can't use her right arm, and I love her. In her woundedness and pain, I am not only more aware of her, I am more aware of Christ within her.

Friends, there are people we know, family member, co-workers and neighbors, as well as strangers we will soon meet or walk by who are wounded, living in pain and need our help and love. Their poverty may be easily seen or cleverly covered up. Either way, I pray we will ask God to give us eyes to see Christ in them. That we will ask God to give us the courage and the grace to have hands and feet to serve them and hearts to truly love them.

We can help alleviate the suffering, pain and poverty in people's lives. You Did It To Me.

In our suffering and in the suffering of others is where Jesus most wants to be and always is.

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve

Ps. Happy Thanksgiving!