

Sunday, November 22, 2020

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Responsorial: Psalm 23:1-3, 5-6

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

What Does it Take to Inherit the Kingdom of God?

Inherit the kingdom. (Matthew 25:34)

Today, on the feast of Christ the King, we celebrate Jesus' sovereignty over all creation. We celebrate the fact that all things were created through him, all things are redeemed through him, and all people will be judged by him.

It's this last point—Jesus as judge—that today's Gospel focuses on. It tells us that as our King, Jesus has the right to set the standard by which we will be judged. Other judges exercise their office based on the existing laws of the land. But Jesus is the law of the kingdom. His life, his way, is the standard by which we will be judged.

If you want to be a judge in this world, you have to know the law intimately. Just one word in one statute can affect the entire outcome of a case. Not so with Jesus. His law is simple. We will "inherit the kingdom" based on this guiding principle: "Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:34, 40). That's the standard: mercy, generosity, and self-giving love.

It's often said that you can't take it with you, and there is a lot of truth to that. All our money, all our honors, all our possessions are temporary. They won't follow us to heaven, and they can't help us get in. But there is something we can take with us: our acts of charity. In fact, they are the very things that will open the gates of heaven to us!

Jesus will not be impressed if we have many possessions, and he will not be disappointed if we have just a few. What matters is whether we have let him soften our hearts so that we feed the hungry, forgive those who have sinned against us, and reach out to the lonely. Because his kingdom is not a kingdom of wealth and power; it is a kingdom of humility, love, and service.

"Jesus, my King and my Judge, teach me to love as you love."

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading opens with these words: *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.*
 - How does the *Lord GOD* describe himself as a shepherd watching over us, his flock?
 - What does the degree of God's care for his sheep tell you about his great love for us?
 - Why is it so difficult in today's world to relate to this pastoral metaphor describing God as a shepherd?
 - As a shepherd of your family, how would you describe your role? In what way is it to mirror God's care for you and to be a witness of a life conformed to Jesus our Shepherd King?
2. The responsorial psalm is Psalm 23 and like the first reading, it continues the metaphor of *The Lord is my shepherd*. It also describes his great care for us, his sheep: *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.*
 - What are the similarities between the first reading and the responsorial psalm? Are there any differences?
 - Since we, as Christians, are one of the sheep being described, how faithful are you in allowing Jesus to give you repose, lead you besides restful waters, refresh your soul, and guide you in *right paths*?
 - What changes can you make to be more receptive to Jesus your shepherd?
3. The second reading begins with these powerful words: *Christ has been raised from the dead, the 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 firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end. The reading also contains these words: For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*
 - What do the beginning words mean to you? In particular, what do the following words mean to you: *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 firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ?*
 - St. Paul describes Christ as risen and reigning. What specific steps can you take to increase Christ's reign in your heart, in your family, in your parish, where you work, or in your neighborhood?
4. In the Gospel, Christ lets us know exactly the things that are important to him when he sits as king on his throne at his second coming: *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.*
 - Which of the actions he describes for the sheep on his right are you willing to do more of in the upcoming weeks, and perhaps, as Advent and Christmas promises to the Lord?
 - What do these final words to the sheep on the right mean to you: *Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me?* Can you identify the *least brothers* of Jesus in your life, knowing that Jesus our King, and our Shepherd, places so much importance on your serving them?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel reading. It includes these words: "We will 'inherit the kingdom' based on this guiding principle: *Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me* (Matthew 25:34, 40). That's the standard: mercy, generosity, and self-giving love." It ends as follows: "Jesus will not be impressed if we have many possessions, and he will not be disappointed if we have just a few. What matters is whether we have let him soften our hearts so that we feed the hungry, forgive those who have sinned against us, and reach out to the lonely. Because his kingdom is not a kingdom of wealth and power; it is a kingdom of humility, love, and service."
 - Why do the words, *Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me*, lead to the standard of "mercy, generosity, and self-giving love"?
 - What do these last words of the meditation mean to you: "his kingdom is not a kingdom of wealth and power; it is a kingdom of humility, love, and service"? How can you put them into better practice?

Take some time now to pray and ask for the grace to *love one another as I have loved you* (John 13:34-35). Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Jesus, my King and my Judge, teach me to love as you love."

[Maurice Blumberg is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National Fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He is also a current leader of his parish ChristLife, Healing, and Men's Ministries. He can be contacted at mblumberg@aol.com.]