

Serving the Master  
Last Sunday of the Church Year (Christ the King), Year A  
Ezekiel 34: 11–16, 20–24; 1 Corinthians 15: 20 – 28; Matthew 25: 25 – 46  
November 22, 2020

*Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today is the last day of the Church Year. So, if you were looking to get rid of 2020 early, today is your day. Time to start living by the Church calendar and not the secular calendar ☺

Today also goes by another name, “Christ the King Sunday”. It may take a little work to get “Christ the King” out of today’s readings, though. Our focus tends to go to the separating of the sheep and the goats, as we look to where we fit in the story. Yes, don’t we almost always look to see where we fit in the story? I think it is one of the symptoms of the disease that we all have; *incurvatus*... being turned in on ourselves... also known as “sin.” More on that later.

But, first, let’s put the focus where it belongs; on Jesus. The last couple of weeks in St. Matthew’s Gospel, we have had two parables about the last day; the Day of the Lord... Judgement Day. Today, we do not have a parable. Instead, we have Jesus telling us, straight up, how things will go.

And, He begins, “*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats*” (v. 31-32).

I hope this sounds familiar, and not just because you’ve read it, or heard it read before, but because we paraphrase it every Sunday, “*And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.*”

They sound similar, do they not? We proclaim every Sunday, in the Creeds, what the Scripture teaches. This is why it is a very good thing to memorize the creeds. They are a

distillation of Scripture that you can easily carry in your heart and in your mind. And, saying them every Sunday, or for some of us, every day, helps us to learn and remember. Another beautiful thing about our liturgy.

The creeds and our reading today, both remind us, not of something that happened in the past, but of a promise that will take place in the future. Jesus will return.

They also remind us that Jesus sits on His 'glorious throne'. He is the 'King of Kings' after all. Yet, as King, He is not a tyrant, but a loving and benevolent ruler.

This is an important thing to remember. Much of the things written in the New Testament concerning the End Times, were not written to scare us. Instead, they were written to a people already afraid. They were spoken and written to a people already under persecution, who were being hunted, ridiculed, cast out, and hated. Those folks didn't need any fear, they had it a plenty. What they needed was comfort. And that is what the writers of the New Testament offered, St. John in the book of Revelation, especially.

So, it is important for us to look at these things as promises, and not threats. As those who belong to God, who look to Him for our salvation and help, our King comes to comfort us, like a shepherd would comfort his sheep when they would hear the howl of the wolf, or the cry of the desert lion. His rod and his staff would comfort them, because he was there for their protection. He, like King David, would sing them a song to calm and comfort them.

Jesus, sings to us a song of comfort today. He is a loving King.

But, to be a King, one has to have a kingdom. What is the kingdom of God over which Christ reigns? The simple, and correct, answer is, everything. He is King of the universe. He created it. He runs it. He rules it.

Yet, it is also good for us to remember, that there will be those who will be outside of His kingdom. There will be those who will no longer be the recipients of His benevolence, mercy and love. Forgiveness will no longer be offered. His protection will be removed as they are cast out into the outer darkness, outside the walls, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Yes, that is scary. But, not for those who are within His kingdom. Those who have been made, not only His children, but also His heirs. Those who He has marked as His own, those who were bought for a price...namely, purchased with the life blood of the very King who rules them.

Our King laid down His life, so that we might live. He sacrificed Himself, so that we would not need another sacrifice. Your King loves you that much.

Our reading today tells us all of this. It really is a wonderful passage of comfort for those who belong to Him, but a dreadful calamity for those who do not belong to Him.

When Jesus returns, He will return as King and Judge. He will separate those who belong to Him from those who don't; much like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

He will bless those who belong to Him, saying, *"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."* <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, saying, *'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?'* (vs. 34-37).

And those who do not belong to Him, He will curse, saying similarly, *"Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels... Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?'"* (vs. 41b, 44).

At first glance, it would seem that those who are focused on doing good works will be rewarded by the King, while those who do not do good deeds will be cast out. But, if we look a little deeper, we will quickly see otherwise.

First, notice that those who did good, didn't even know that they had done good. They were surprised to know that they had received the King's blessing. They did not understand how they had blessed the King. Yet, the King replies, "*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me*" (v. 40b).

Here's the thing about this story that is important for us to note and to remember: It isn't the works that save, but the love of neighbor.

Here's the difference. The ones who focus on their works do so in order to receive their wage. They only look to what they will get out of doing that work. In essence, they are simply doing things for others in order to gain something for themselves. It is *incurvatus*; selfishness, self-centeredness... it is sin. They are really no different from those who do not serve their neighbor at all. While the outcome is different, the neighbor is or isn't served, the motivation is the same; self.

But, the one who is simply focused on those who need their help and service are serving their neighbor. They do so out of love of their neighbor, not to gain points with God or with man. It is simply following Jesus' command to '*love your neighbor as you love yourself.*'

So, here is the deal, my friends, we are servants of the King, not because we do good works, but by being like Him. We love those who need it. We serve those who need it. We care for those who need it. We love those who need it. And who doesn't need it...all of it?

*"but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"*  
(Rom. 5:8).

*Amen.*

