

CHRIST THE KING
THIRTY-FOURTH
SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A



FIRST READING
Ezekiel 34:11–12, 15–17

PSALM
Psalm 23:1–6

SECOND READING
1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 28

GOSPEL
Matthew 25:31–46

Prayer

Psalm 23:1–6

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.

He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake. Even
though I walk through the
darkest valley,

I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

You prepare a table
before me in the presence
of my enemies; you
anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and
mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the
house of the LORD
my whole life long.

Reading the Word

Ezekiel 34:11–12, 15–17

Thus says the Lord GOD:
I myself will search for my
sheep, and will seek them
out. As shepherds seek out
their flocks when they are
among their scattered sheep,
so I will seek out my sheep. I
will rescue them from all the

places to which they have
been scattered on a day of
clouds and thick darkness.

I myself will be the shepherd
of my sheep, and I will make
them lie down, says the Lord
GOD. I will seek the lost, and
I will bring back the strayed,
and I will bind up the injured,
and I will strengthen the
weak, but the fat and the
strong I will destroy. I will feed
them with justice. As for you,
my flock, thus says the Lord
GOD: I shall judge between
sheep and sheep, between
rams and goats.

1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 28

Christ has been raised from
the dead, the first fruits of
those who have died. For
since death came through a
human being, the resurrec-
tion of the dead has also come
through a human being; for
as all die in Adam, so all will be
made alive in Christ. But each
in his own 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 God the Father, after he
has destroyed every ruler 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 all

things are subjected to him,
then the Son himself will also
be subjected to the one who
put all things in subjection
under him, so that God may
be all in all.

Matthew 25:31–46

Jesus said, "When the Son of
Man comes in his glory, and
all the angels with him, then
he will sit on the throne of
his glory. All the nations will
be gathered before him, and
he will separate people one
from another as a shepherd
separates the sheep from the
goats, and he will put the
sheep at his right hand and
the goats at the left. Then
the king will say to those at
his right hand, 'Come, you
that 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
something to drink, I was a
stranger and you welcomed
me, I was naked and you gave
me clothing, I was sick and
you took care of me, I was in
prison and you visited me.'

Then the righteous will
answer him, 'Lord, when was

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it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me 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 nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Hearing the Word

"Care!"

Today's liturgy concludes the liturgical year. Over the past two Sundays, the readings focused on preparation for the final events of life and human history with the two-fold message: "prepare" and "develop". Today, this series concludes with reflection on

the final judgment and addition of the final element to this preparation sequence, summarized in one admonition: "care!"

The prophet Ezekiel, time and again, reflects on the reasons for the destruction of Jerusalem, and his beloved Temple, by the Babylonians in 586 BC. He frequently blames the leaders, "the shepherds of Israel", for abusing the people and leading the nation to its destruction (cf. Ezek 34:1-10). In today's reading, the prophet speaks about a new leader, the Good Shepherd, who is God himself. Ezekiel anticipates that God will restore the scattered community and becomes its good shepherd. The first task of a good shepherd is to gather the scattered sheep into a flock. Thus, Ezekiel anticipates that God will put an end to the exile and restore the Israelite community, making it a nation again.

Second, a good shepherd protects the integrity of his flock by caring for each sheep and safeguarding its order. Thus, Ezekiel anticipates that God will provide that care by leading, guarding and healing his people. Furthermore, God will establish harmony among his people by implementing justice. Justice will mean destruction of "the fat and the strong", and the separation of different types of animals. "The fat and the strong" likely refer to those whom Ezekiel previously called "bad shepherds" who have fattened themselves by abusing the flock instead of protecting it. God's wrath will fall upon them for their abuses

and self-interest. Having experienced disastrous leadership that led to scattering of the Israelites, Ezekiel declares that God will himself become the leader who ensures his peoples' lasting well-being and peace.

In the closing chapters of 1 Corinthians Paul also looks towards the future. Having addressed numerous practical and pastoral problems in the community, he finally responds to those who doubted the resurrection of the body by providing a brief but comprehensive outline of the events that will take place at the end of times.

It all begins with the resurrection of Christ, the first ever to rise from the dead, which makes the human resurrection possible. Next, Christ' return will take place followed by the resurrection of all Christ's faithful. At his coming, Christ will destroy everything that opposes God, every "ruler and every authority and power". Among these will be death itself, which means that harmony and order in creation will be restored. At his coming, Christ will assume authority over everything, the authority which he will then hand over to God himself, with the effect that "God [will be] all in all". This last phrase beautifully describes the final outcome of Christ's mission as the unification of all creation, including humanity, with God. At the end of times, God and his creation will return to the state of harmony which human sin destroyed.

Paul provided this brief but profound summary of the final

events of history to reassure his faithful in Corinth about resurrection and the final union with God and Christ which awaits them in the future. By placing this argument at the very end of his letter, he also reminded them that they must adequately prepare for it, by living disciplined Christian lives within their community.

The final parables in the Gospel of Matthew contains a majestic description of the last judgment which will take place at Christ's arrival as the glorious "Son of Man" surrounded by angels, and taking his place on the heavenly throne as the true king. All nations will be gathered before him for judgement, which will take the form of separation between the sheep and the goats, just as in the passage from Ezekiel.

Surprisingly, this judgement does not involve evaluation of human deeds or achievements. Instead, the judgment is pronounced based on one's actions with respect to the six basic human needs: food, drink, hospitality, clothing, health, and freedom. Those who cared for others and secured their needs in these areas are pronounced righteous and worthy of eternal life; those who failed to do so, are condemned. These six areas of need describe a holistic care for a human being in terms of bodily needs (food, drink, clothing and health) and spiritual/psychological needs (hospitality towards strangers and companionship for prisoners).

However, the parable's message goes much further, providing a profoundly spiritual teaching by pointing to identification between the heavenly King, Christ, and those in need of care. The celebrated phrase "just as you did to one of the least of my people, you did it to me" brilliantly describes the essence of Christian morality. This essence lies in recognising Jesus' presence in fellow human beings. The parable does not speak of a mere humanitarian concern for everyone. In the parable, Jesus uses the phrase "members of my family" to designate those who are to be cared for, indicating that he completely identifies himself with the community members. Thus, true Christian faith expresses itself not so much through acts of piety, but through concrete care and service to one another. In some sense, this service could be described as an act of worship because Jesus, and through him God himself, are recognized and honoured in a fellow human being. This parable teaches that to prepare for the final judgment one needs a deeply contemplative perception of life to recognize God's presence in a fellow human being, particularly a Christian. That recognition must lead to acts of active care for others which constitute the best preparation for the final judgement.

The liturgical year closes with the imposing and panoramic vision of the conclusion of human life and history, where God the Good Shepherd, as foreseen by Ezekiel, will restore his people to life and

right relationship with himself. Paul summarized this process in a single phrase: "God will be all in all". According to the parable of the last judgment, Christians ought to prepare for this event by acts of care for their fellow community members. The parable emphasises that this care is not just a general humanitarian concern for the world, but a focused effort which addressed bodily or spiritual needs of others. Various acts of Christian piety are certainly important, but the essence of Christian faith and morality lies in the recognition of God's presence in a fellow human being. Therefore, preparation for the final encounter with Christ involves honouring Christ in fellow Christians through showing them attention and care, particularly in the hour of need. Living in such a manner, believers can face the future with every confidence, and joyfully repeat with the Psalmist the words of jubilation, "I shall dwell in the house of the LORD, my whole life long"

Listening to the Word of God

A story is told of a rich man who died. As the angels of God escorted him to the house where he would spend his eternity, they came across a beautiful mansion. He asked, "Whose house is this?" One of the angels replied, "It is the future home of one of your servants on earth." In excitement, he retorted, "Wonderful! If this is the home of my servant in eternity, then certainly mine would be extremely beautiful." Soon, they arrived at a dilapidated crude shanty

in an arid ground. “Mister, this would be your home for all eternity”, said one of the angels. With a look of disappointment on his face, the man asked, “Why must I reside in such a wretched and unpleasant abode for all eternity, whereas my servant has a mansion all to himself?” In reply, the angel said, “Here, in eternity, we build homes for people using the virtues and works of mercy they send us as building materials. Your servant has been sending us materials like goodness, kindness, hospitality and love and that is what we have used in putting up that gorgeous building for him. When you were on earth, you hardly sent us the materials we needed to build you a beautiful home. Hence we cannot help but leave you in this wretched place for all eternity.”

The import of this above story is that it pays to live a virtuous life. Even if no one seems to acknowledge your good works on earth, take heart, heaven takes note of it and in eternity, you would discover it was worth doing good on earth. Indeed, every good deed is a spiritual investment for eternity.

There is an African proverb, popular among farmers, which says “do not expect to pluck mangoes when you have planted maize.” In other words, we harvest what we sow. Our actions in relation to others are seeds that we sow. Momentarily, we may not see its effect but with time we would come to appreciate the import of what we have done.

We often use the expression “spiritual person” when describing a person who is always seen in Church praying or reading the Bible. Well, Jesus in our Gospel text helps us to appreciate the fact that a really spiritual person is one who cares for the members of the human family – “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”

There is a saying that, “when I die, God will not measure my head to see how knowledgeable I was. He will measure my heart to see how loving I have been. At the point of death, the only thing we can carry into eternity is either our virtues or vices. In sum, when all is said and done, what matters is how we treat each other. When Christ the King comes, he would gather unto himself those who have shown genuine care for their fellow community members. Love has hands and feet; these are our hands and feet. It runs and lifts up those who are downtrodden in society and embraces them with our caring arms.

Proverb

“Do not expect to pluck mangoes when you have planted maize.”

Action

Self-examination

What is my attitude towards those who are battling with one problem or the other? When was the last time when I offered a helping hand to someone? How do I understand Christian faith and life? I examine my understanding and practice of it against the teaching of today's Gospel reading.

Response to God

In silence, I will sit in the presence of God and call to mind anyone I know who needs some form of tender loving care. I prayerfully offer that person/persons to God.

Response to your World

I will make an effort to see Christ's presence in others and act toward them as if I was interacting with Jesus himself.

As a group, we decide which of the acts of charity mentioned in today's Gospel we should perform, and act accordingly.

Prayer

Eternal Father, make me an instrument of your love and care. I offer myself to bring light to those who languish in the pain of darkness and to bring hope where all hope is gone. For the sake of Christ, I pray. Amen.