

Homily for the Feast of Christ the King

November 21-22, 2020

Readings: Ezekiel 34: 11-12, 15-17; 1 Corinthians 15: 20-26, 28; Matthew 25: 31-46

Preacher: Sr. Barbara Moore

Our liturgical year is ending with a focus on “Kingship” and that seems so countercultural these days. I am always amazed by the attention the British Royal Family receives here in the States. I also sense that some of its younger members are trying to adjust that image to contemporary times.

It seems that both the Prophet Ezekiel and Jesus are trying to do something just as unusual. It’s amazing that they portray their “king” or “leader” as a loving shepherd. In Jesus’ case, equating himself with the Shepherding of a community. The opposite image of king that is presented in these readings is also interesting. The “chosen people” were surrounded by kings and rulers who reminded them of an ever-present threat. And Jesus lived under the rule of an all-powerful emperor. He grew up with an understanding of the power and cruelty of Rome and kings. This feast dates back to 1925 when Pope Pius XI was trying to assert the global influence of Jesus and the Vatican as well, making efforts to counter a growing secularism around the world.

But the use of the image of a shepherd on this feast of Christ the King is interesting. They seem so distinct from one another. While the title was, at times applied to rulers, shepherds in many circles were considered stupid, unclean, and negligent in meeting their responsibilities. Some rulers were called shepherds because they led their people into troubling places. But in the Old Testament there is a call for leaders to be good shepherds like their God, Yahweh. Ezekiel tells his listeners that God tends, finds, rescues, heals, seeks out and dwells among his sheep. This beautiful image is taken up by the Psalmist: “Beside restful waters God leads me and refreshes my soul.” But even with all their faults, shepherds were essential, and they are the first, according to Luke, to come to see the child Jesus. Angels and shepherds, unlikely companions, becoming visitors at that birth.

But these realities, I believe, move us to the center of our faith.

Jesus Christ equates himself with those often considered lesser than others, and those occupying the margins of life—qualities so needed in rulers around our world.

Jesus in the Gospel speaks of himself in two ways. His glorious return like a king and also his actions like a shepherd separating sheep from goats. This Gospel refers to both the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. But it goes beyond that reality. The shepherd and king equates himself with the flock. “What you did for one of the least brothers and sisters of mine you did for me.” It seems to me that Christ is saying to us that he is present, that he is the one on the margins whom we are called to serve and assist.

Edwina Gateley and Robert Lentz have published a beautiful book entitled, *Christ in the Margins*. It is filled with icons and reflections. Stories about men and women both living and dead who have spent themselves in service on the margins of life. It describes how they reached out to those in whom Jesus reminds us today, he resides. Gateley in one of her reflections speaks of the “Magic on the Margins.” She describes what she means when she writes, “As they (the figures in her book) immersed themselves in the poor and marginalized, they were nourished and transformed by the very wounded to whom they were sent.”

That is the challenge Christ the Shepherd King is presenting to us today. It is not about power it is about service. It is about “What we do for the least of our brothers and sisters” in our thoughts, prayers, and service. For there we find Christ in them.

