

34th or LAST SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (Cycle A)
The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King
November 20, 2005 – Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.

INTRODUCTION

Theme of the Readings

Today's readings revolve around the final judgment of Jesus Christ when He comes in glory and power. In the context of the passage from the prophet Ezekiel, it is God Himself who will come to tend personally to His sheep because the entrusted shepherds have not been found worthy of their charge. God will come to tend to the sick and ailing sheep but will separate and punish those who have made themselves strong at the expense of the weak.

St. Matthew's Gospel completes this pastoral image with Jesus' account of future certain events. Each person will be distinguished as a sheep or a goat according to a simple standard of practical attention to those who suffer. The standard of judgment is simple enough; 'whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did it to me' (v.40). What may surprise us is God's identification with the most insignificant of his brothers: 'you did it to me.' What is also remarkable is that the just seem to be unaware that, in their life of service to the unfortunate, it was the Lord Himself whom they were serving. Definitive judgment will be served on all.

St. Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth of the fact of the resurrection from the dead, just as Jesus Christ died and rose to life. Death, inherited from Adam, will itself be destroyed. Those who belong to Christ will form part of His kingdom. In this Kingdom all will be subject to Christ the King.

Psalm 23 sings of the Lord as the Good Shepherd who will feed, guide and protect His sheep. It is in the Lord that true goodness is to be found.

Doctrinal Message

Judgment, salvation and condemnation: Jesus reminds his hearers many times in the Gospels of the contrast between this time of liberty of action, and the impending judgment that awaits each person. In today's Gospel He emphasizes the criterion of judgment to be used, the active attention to the needs of others, especially those who suffer. It is a remarkable characteristic

of Christianity the stress on brotherly love, and the fact that God considers as done to Himself whatever small service to someone in need. He emphasizes the religious importance of attention to brotherly needs. In Christianity, it is the practical interest in the needs of others that is to become the paramount concern of our lives. Our charity is not to be a series of token gestures, but the real, central motivation of our lives. Merely not giving offence is not enough; positive and practical attention to others, in all orders of needs, is required.

The Gospel passage also reminds us that we are to be found worthy of God on the Day of Judgment. What is implied is a personal task of growth and assimilation of the truth of the Gospel and of grace in this life. Apparently there are some who remain willfully unaware of this basic human task and, through their refusal, are unfit for the Kingdom of God.

Catechism references: paragraphs 668-682 refer to the Second Coming and the judgment of the living and the dead. Paragraphs 1020-1060 deal with everlasting life, particular judgment, Heaven, Hell, the Final Judgment and the new Heaven and new Earth.

Pastoral Applications

We seem to have fairly vague and hazy ideas about eternal life, and the necessary qualifications. We seem to understand that God loves all sinners, that He cannot exclude anyone, and that a sincere ‘sorry’ for our sins on arrival will assure all of us a place in the Kingdom. There is, therefore, no real preoccupation here and now as to what we do or not do; everything will necessarily be all right in the end.

Certainly there is much of God’s justice and His mercy that goes beyond our understanding, but the import of the Gospels on judgment and separation contain elements that do not correspond to the ‘all comers welcome’ view.

Throughout the Gospels we are given precise indications of our task in hand here and now, with a clear warning of the relation between how we accomplish this task and our acceptance or rejection by God after death. It is true that we are weak and sinful; we are also capable and strong. There is a clear difference between someone who completes his task, with errors (even serious errors), and someone who fundamentally errs in life. We are all sinners, but there is a distinction between those who have sinned in life

while fulfilling their task, and those who have only their sins to show.

What is the task of Christians? Our culture seems to thrive on an ethos of self-promotion, self-fulfillment. We are pushed to become the best, the highest, the most important. All these categories presuppose a competitive mentality, what distinguishes and separates me from others, what I can achieve at the expense of others. There is a truth and there is an error in this mentality. The cultivation of one's talents and gifts, and one's very person is a legitimate goal in life, but it is not to be at the expense but at the service of others, that is, to serve the needs of others. In other words, it is not sufficient to ask ourselves what I want to be and to do (what my talents are, what I am best at) but also, to whom I want to give my best.

It may be that some people consider Christian service as some type of second rate livelihood, a waste of talent doing 'what anyone could do'. We may have a caricature of Christian service to mean just 'washing the dishes'. Far more appealing, and perhaps much closer to the Gospel meaning of dedicated service, is the conscious offering of all one's gifts, one's imagination and ambition, the full potential of one's life, to do something great and worthy of the Gospel, for the service of others.

READINGS

Reading I

Ez 34:11-12, 15-17

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.

As for you, my sheep, says the Lord GOD,
I will judge between one sheep and another,
between rams and goats.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 23:1-2, 2-3, 5-6

R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

In verdant pastures he gives me repose.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Beside restful waters he leads me;

he refreshes my soul.

He guides me in right paths

for his name's sake.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me

in the sight of my foes;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

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.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Reading II

1 Cor 15:20-26, 28

Brothers and sisters:

Christ has been raised from the dead,
the firstfruits 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,
when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father,
when he has destroyed every sovereignty
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 everything is subjected to him,
then the Son himself will also be subjected
to the one who subjected everything to him,
so that God may be all in all.

Gospel

Mt 25:31-46

Jesus said to his disciples:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory,
and all the angels with him,
he will sit upon his glorious throne,
and all the nations will be assembled before him.
And he will separate them one from another,
as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.
Then the king will say to those on his right,
'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.'

Then the righteous will answer him and say,
'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you,
or thirsty and give you drink?
When did we see you a stranger and welcome you,
or naked and clothe you?
When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'
And the king will say to them in reply,
'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did
for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.'
Then he will say to those on his left,
'Depart from me, you accursed,
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 no drink,
a stranger and you gave me no welcome,
naked and you gave me no clothing,
ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.'
Then they will answer and say,
'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty
or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison,
and not minister to your needs?'
He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you,
what you did not do for one of these least ones,
you did not do for me.'
And these will go off to eternal punishment,
but the righteous to eternal life."