

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King/34th Sunday of the Year
November 26, 2017 11:30 a.m. St. Augustine Cathedral

Well, I hope you all had a very Happy Thanksgiving, and that you've all survived Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and are ready for Cyber Monday! Yes, it's that time of year again---the beginning of the Holidays and the busiest time of the year as we prepare for Christmas, which is now less than a month away.

But today, we come together to celebrate a very special Feast which culminates the entire Liturgical Year: the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King! This is the Feast that the Church has strategically placed on the 34th and last Sunday of the Church Year as a way to shine a spotlight on Who Jesus is and What He has accomplished. Next Sunday, as we begin the Season of Advent, we'll begin a whole new Church Year which prepares us to celebrate Jesus' birth, Who came into the world as the Prince of Peace. And throughout that new Church Year, we will celebrate anew each week how Jesus accomplished His mission---His purpose--- in this world, which of course, was to bring us salvation, and to reconcile the world, and each of us in the world, to a right relationship with God, so that we can share in the victory that Jesus won by His death and resurrection.

But, in addition to that, Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of God in this world. It's not a Kingdom that we can see, and it's not a particular place. It's a Kingdom that is *in* this world, but not *of* this world. In fact, even though the Scriptures ascribe the title of King, among many others, to Jesus, He Himself shied away from that title. Remember the conversation that Pilate had when Jesus was put on trial before His Crucifixion?----Pilate kept wanting Jesus to claim to be King so he could have something for which to condemn Him, but Jesus' response was: "*It is you who say I am a King. The reason I was born, the reason why I came into the world, is to testify to the Truth. Anyone committed to the Truth hears My Voice.*"

So, today is the day for all of us who hear Jesus' voice, and who are committed to live our lives according to the Truth that Jesus came to reveal to the world about God's love and mercy, to acclaim once more that Jesus is the King of the Universe and the King of our lives.

Interestingly enough the Scripture Readings that we have just listened to don't focus so much on the image of King, certainly not in the sense of what a King is in terms of the "world's" understanding.

In today's First Reading, the Prophet Ezekiel was criticizing the religious and civic leaders of the people of Israel who were abusing the people; those leaders were being self-serving, and concerned only about their own well-being. And so, as we heard in the Reading, God decided to intervene and take care of His people directly. The image that was used was that of a Good Shepherd who cares about and loves his Sheep. And so God said: "*I myself will look after and tend my sheep;....I will rescue them....pasture them....give them rest. I will seek out the lost and bind up the injured.*" But in addition to being a Loving/Merciful Shepherd, God also promised that He would be a Just Judge, "*judging between one sheep and another.*"

And of course, today's Gospel from St. Matthew is the Parable of the Final Judgment with which we are all so familiar. In this Parable, the "King" is more of a Judge who, at the end of all time, comes to gather "all the nations" before Him as He sits on his "glorious throne", and separates all the people into two groups, the sheep on His right, and the goats on His left.

As we sit here today, I'm not going to say which of these two sides would be the right or the left, but I'm pretty sure that every time any of us hears this Gospel passage read, we hope real hard that when "that time" comes, we're the ones among the sheep on the right side, however that is determined, so we can hear the words: "*Come, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*"

What's critically important about this Gospel, and therefore, about this Feast on the final Sunday of the Church Year, is that we each need to realize that, in a sense, we are "masters of our own destiny". Jesus doesn't use some indiscriminate gauge to determine who comes into Heaven; it's not the "luck of the draw", or an "iney, meeny, miney, mo" method. No, Jesus tells us very, very clearly what it takes to hear those words.

First of all, it takes what we heard St. Paul talking about in today's Second Reading from his First Letter to the Corinthians: it takes the fact that Jesus has won the gift of salvation for us through his death and resurrection---what St. Paul called "*the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep*". And then, St. Paul tells us, Jesus will share His victory with "*those who belong to Christ*". Will that be us? How will anyone know whether we "belong to Christ" or not?

Once again, Jesus is *very* clear how the Just Judge at the end of all time will know whether we belong to Christ or not, and therefore, whether we will be grouped with the Sheep or the Goats.

We just have to answer three simple questions. **First**, to use Jesus' own criteria from that conversation He had with Pilate, are we committed to the Truth and hearing Jesus' Voice? **Second**, to use St. Paul's way of determining, "do we belong to Christ"? And **finally**, in keeping with the very concrete way in today's Gospel Parable that Jesus gives to us, "Do we see Jesus in those we meet each day who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, ill, and in prison, and attend to their needs???"

If we are committed to the Truth as Jesus has revealed it to the world, if we belong to Christ and live according to His teachings and those of His Church, and if we respond to the corporal and spiritual works of mercy for our fellow human beings because in them we see the Face of Christ----*then*, we can be pretty sure that we will be considered among those whom Jesus calls "the righteous" and in what group we'll be. And, of course, if not, then we had better make every effort as we prepare to begin a new Church Year to change our ways, so as not to be counted among those who are referred to as "the accursed".

As those who belong to Christ, we need to be mindful of the circumstances of all those who live in the human family. Obviously, we can't feed, clothe or visit every hungry, naked or imprisoned person in the world, but we CAN pray for them, be mindful of them, work for solutions to change those conditions that exist by participating in the processes through the Church and Society to help bring about more just and equitable situations for all people everywhere.

As you may be aware, today has also been designated by the U.S. Bishops as a special Day of Prayer for people just like us, but who happen to live in parts of the world where they are persecuted if they try to practice their faith. In some parts of the world, if people try to go to Mass, or to put their faith into practice in their daily lives, they can be arrested, tortured, oppressed, or even killed. These people might be fellow Catholics, or other Christians or members of various religious minorities. This is taking place mostly in the Middle East, and particularly, in the Holy Land itself where Jesus lived, died and rose again in Glory. Just yesterday there was a horrific attack in a Mosque in northern Egypt, killing 238 innocent people

during their time of worship and injuring almost another 200 people. We need to pray for those being persecuted, and remain very aware of what is happening in the world. We need to support those agencies who work to protect religious liberty. We need to advocate on behalf of all those who suffer religious persecution. And we need to welcome those “strangers” who are forced to flee their homelands because of these persecutions.

As this Church Year comes to an end, and as we prepare to begin a new Church Year next week, we must consciously make our choice: are we among the sheep, or the goats? Do we want to hear Our Lord/King say to us: Come to Me or Depart from Me?

In these days of growing intolerance in many parts of the world, we, as People of Faith, must be vigilant, but at the same time bold, courageous and joyful as we remain “committed to the Truth” as Jesus our Lord has revealed it, as we continue to “belong to Christ our Savior”, and as we foster and protect our allegiance to Christ the King of the Universe, and the King of our Lives.

God bless you, now and always!