Christ the King – The Shepherd King

Sunday 22 November 2026

Readings: Ezekiel 34:11–12, 15–17 | Psalm 22(23) | 1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 28 | Matthew 25:31–46

Today we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King or to give it it's official title, Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. But to start we need to think a little differently about what it means to be a king.

When we think of kings, we tend to imagine crowns, palaces, wealth, power and authority. People who sit above others, give orders and expect to be served. But today's readings give us a very different picture.

In our first reading, the prophet Ezekiel speaks of God as a shepherd. God promises to search for the lost, bring back those who have wandered, bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. And then, in our Psalm, we hear those familiar and beautiful words of the Lord's my Shepherd.

A shepherd who knows his sheep, who understands their needs, who guides them, protects them and doesn't abandon them when they wander off or get into difficulty.

And this is where shepherding and kingship come together.

In biblical times, a king was often described as a shepherd of his people. His responsibility wasn't simply to rule over them, but to protect them, provide for them and lead them in the right direction.

A good king was expected to put the welfare of his people before his own interests.

And that is exactly what we see in Jesus.

He is the King of the Universe, but he is also the Good Shepherd. His crown wasn't made of gold; it was made of thorns. His throne wasn't a palace; it was a cross. And his greatest demonstration of power wasn't commanding others, but giving his own life for them.

Jesus is a King who rules by serving, rather than by being served.

But there is something particularly important about today's feast that concerns every one of us.

At our baptism, each of us was anointed with holy oil and called to share in Christ's threefold mission: priest, prophet and king. We often hear about being called to be priests or prophets, but perhaps we spend less time thinking about what it means to share in Christ's kingship.

It certainly doesn't mean expecting others to bow down to us or having authority over people.
It means accepting responsibility for those entrusted to our care and serving them diligently, wherever we are called, and that brings us back to the image of the shepherd.
We may not have flocks of sheep, but we all have people in our lives who need guiding, protecting, encouraging and sometimes simply looking after. Our children, our families, our friends, our neighbours, people we work alongside, and perhaps even those who are difficult to
Over whom am I personally a shepherd? And perhaps more importantly, **to whom am I called to serve?**

Because that is where today's Gospel becomes so challenging. Jesus describes the final judgement, when the Son of Man comes in glory and separates the people as a shepherd separates sheep from goats, and what is the measure by which people are judged?

It isn't their wealth, their achievements, their importance or their position in society.

Instead, Jesus gives us a very simple list:

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 sick, and you visited me.
I was in prison, and you came to see me.

Both the righteous and those who are condemned ask the same question:

"Lord, when did we see you?"

And Jesus answers:

"Whatever you did to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did to me."

In other words, Jesus is telling us that he is present in the very people we sometimes find easiest to overlook.

The lonely person, the stranger, the person who is struggling, the person who has made mistakes, and even the person we might find difficult to love. And this is perhaps the greatest test of our own kingship.

Are we prepared to be shepherds to those people?

Are we prepared to put their needs before our own convenience?

Are we prepared to offer our time, our patience and our compassion, even when there is nothing in return for us?

Because being a Christian isn't simply about attending Mass, saying our prayers or knowing our Scriptures.

It's about allowing our faith to become visible in the way we live and where we live that out, and that doesn't necessarily require extraordinary gestures.

It might be a telephone call to somebody who is lonely, visiting someone who is ill or simply noticing somebody whom everyone else seems to overlook.

As we come to the end of another liturgical year and prepare to enter Advent, perhaps we should remember that we are not simply waiting for Christ to come.

We are called to recognise him in the people already around us.

And if we want to understand what it means to be a king, we need only look at Jesus.

The King of the Universe, who became a servant.

The Good Shepherd, who searches for the lost.

The Saviour, who gave everything for his flock.

So perhaps we should take one final thought away with us today:

A “good” shepherd isn’t measured by how many sheep follow him because they are afraid. It’s how many he has cared for, protected and helped along the way.

And perhaps that is a good measure of Christian kingship too.

Not how many people serve us, but how many people we are prepared to serve.

As we enter the season of Advent. We would do well to focus on that service, our Kingship and how we can serve each other and ourselves