

22nd November 2020 Sunday before Advent

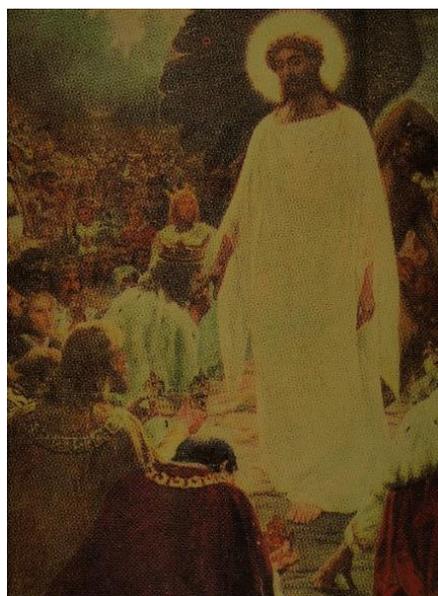
Readings

Ezekiel 34: 11 – 16, 20 - 24

Psalms 100

Ephesians 1: 15 - 23

Matthew 25: 31 - 46



King of kings

Today marks the end of the Church's liturgical year. Next Sunday we shall begin a new series of Bible readings at the start of Advent. Christmas is in sight! However different a covid19 Christmas may be it will still be our celebration of the amazing, stupendous, mind-blowing event when God made himself known and readily available as a person just like us. I have too little space to explain how this divine entry happened at the perfect moment in the world's history as a humble mother gave birth to her first child. How else could it have been? We all arrive here in a totally helpless, dependent state!

Unfortunately, in recent times we have so emphasised the manhood of Jesus – almost becoming matey with him in our songs and prayers – that we miss the wonder of God in Christ. Shutting the story into a fairy-tale stable with clean hay and quiet, un-smelly sheep and cows we tend to forget the armed soldiers, criminals, homeless beggars and many others passing by, oblivious to heaven's carol singers frightening shepherds up on the hills. Equally we lose sight of what Charles Wesley describes as the mingling of the two dimensions of heaven and earth when God, our Lord of might and majesty, the supreme, powerful creator of the universe, utters his first human cry and sheds the first of many human tears.

Today is also called *Christ the King Sunday*, recalling that the King of kings is about to arrive, just as he will again at the summing up of all our history. The picture at the head of my Thought this week is a favourite of mine. The original was destroyed by enemy action during the second world war. Painted by Charles E. Butler it depicts Jesus standing in front of his Cross with a defeated Satan cowering behind it. The Lord, wearing his crown of thorns is receiving homage from more than 150 recognisable leaders of the world's nations, past and present, together with a countless array of people just like us.

I love this Sunday because I believe Jesus is God and Lord of all creation and we cannot raise him high enough in our worship and praise. He is the divine, crowned King of all kings. I am sure that if we can live with that concept of God who *'walks with us and talks with us'*, it revolutionises our understanding of faith, of Christian life and of the whole nature and purpose of the Church. I am not alone in this belief. Paul tells Christians at Ephesus the same thing in today's reading. Christ the King Sunday is the *touch-paper* for the real fireworks of Advent and Christmas.

Charles Butler's picture was controversial in its time. Some argued that many of the figures he depicts had no right to be there. This was an occasion for the saints! However, the most wonderful symbolism in the picture is saints and sinners brought together before the King, the Cross and the defeated devil. When the King comes, saints and sinners are sorted out in the presence of forgiving, sacrificial love.

Today's Gospel reading tells the same story in terms of sheep and goats. Anyone who has lived in Asia and Africa will know how often in the poorest villages it is difficult to tell the sheep from the goats, but in human terms there is a way of distinguishing saints from sinners. It's to see how Christ-like they are. Feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, visiting the prisoners (or locked-downs) the changed sinners prove their saintliness and by this new way of life are recognised as being like him. Doing it for Jesus is a sure indication of our likeness to him – the King of kings – and of our place before him when he comes again in the glory of his Kingdom.

To kneel before the King of kings and his Cross is the finest way to approach Advent and prepare for his coming.

A PRAYER (*after Ephesians 1*)

God, our glorious Father, give us the Spirit of Jesus,
To open our minds to the light of your truth;
To know the hope to which you have called us;
And to experience how great is your power of love
working among us who believe.

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