

Solemnity of Jesus Christ, the King

[Reading I: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 23:1-2, 2-3, 5-6](#)

[Reading II: 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28](#)

[Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/112220.cfm>



The prophet Ezekiel provides our first reading as we end the church year. Ezekiel ministered during the Babylonian exile of the people in Judah in the early 6th century before Christ. He is confronting the issue of whether God has forgotten the people of Judah as they spend years in Babylon. In our ready today, Ezekiel presents God as the shepherd of Judah who will act on behalf of the weak and injured and confront those who have misused their power.

In the preceding verses, Ezekiel has denounced the kings of Judah who were poor leaders. Because of this, all the people have suffered by going into exile, God will act because the people of Judah are still God's people and he is committed to them. He will also show special care for the weak and injured. The people of Judah should have no fear that God has forsaken them. God will send the great king who will be the long-awaited messiah.

The Gospel passage is the end of the eschatological discourse that we have been reading for the last few weeks. The themes of being ready and not being afraid underlie this message. It follows from the Ezekiel passage conclusion with the judgment between sheep and goats. It also draws on imagery from chapter 7 of the Book of Daniel.

The key message is that those who live by love are participating in the reign of God. As they show care for others, they express love, and what they do is done for Christ. Even those who do not recognize Christ, if they live and act out of love, are welcomed. Those who act in a loving manner do so because of concern for the other person. There is no hint that they have selfish motives.

The practices described have become known as the corporal (bodily) works of mercy. The address attends to the physical needs of those around us. The church as long viewed these as essential works of Christians. Entire religious orders have been founded to do these. Parallel to these are the spiritual works of mercy. These address the spiritual needs of humanity like teaching, counselling, and forgiving. These are important works as well.

Scholars debate whether this passage describes just care for disciples of Jesus or referring to care for anyone in need. There is a strong connection to recognizing Jesus in his disciples. Yet, because Jesus became human, he is also a brother to all women and men.

The second reading is from St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. One of the challenges that Paul confronts with the community in Corinth is that some do not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Only those who are alive when Christ returns will be able to share in the reign of Christ.

Paul counters this with the fact that Christ has been raised is like the first fruits of the harvest. The first piece of fruit off a tree or the first berry from a bush are signs of many more to come. Likewise, Jesus, who was raised, is a sign for us that resurrection awaits us. Paul tries to assure the community that all who have died will be raised and share in the reign of Christ.

This will happen when he returns. This coming of Christ will take place when all evil, even death, has been defeated.

The church professes belief in the resurrection in the Nicene Creed each week with the words: ‘I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.’ We know that resurrection involves a transformation, but we have no words to describe this transformation. Each person will truly be themselves but renewed and living as part of the new creation.

Themes:

Corporal and spiritual works of mercy
Resurrected life

Christian leadership
Final heavenly reign

Reflection Questions

What feelings or images arise for you from these passages?

What does the title king, when applied to Jesus, mean for you?

Have you experienced God tending to your needs? Think of examples.

Who has been a shepherd to you?

Have you recognized Jesus in those whom you have assisted?
In whom do you struggle to recognize Jesus?

How do you imagine the reign of God?

What thoughts or questions do you have about the resurrection of the dead?

Suggestions for Prayer

For the Church: that we may recognize Christ in one another and honor the dignity of each person to whom God has life

For all leaders of Christian communities: that they may be shepherds like Jesus who gather the lost, bind up the injured, and encourage the weak so that all may know the fullness of life

For the suffering, forgotten, and marginalized in society: that God will shepherd them, heal their wounds, and lead them to fuller and more fruitful lives

For an opening of our hearts: that we may feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and assist the sick and dying

For world leaders: that their hearts may comprehend the depth of human suffering that exists and urgently strive to address the needs for food, clean water, safety, and healthcare for the human family