Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you must use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Ezekiel 34.11-16 and 20-24; Psalm 95.1-7a; Ephesians 1. 15-23; Matthew 25. 31-46

Homily

Today’s homily has been written by Kate Pateman, LLM in the Leverington, Newton & Tydd St Giles Benefice

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.’

A king sitting on a throne, surrounded by his gorgeous court, resplendent in all his glory, with the nations of the world gathered around him. That is the picture that comes to mind at the beginning of our Gospel reading today. A king, sitting in judgement, radiating majesty and power. That is what kings are all about – isn’t it?

Last May we witnessed the coronation of King Charles III. Although the events were described as being “pared down” in comparison with previous coronations, yet there was a great deal of pageantry and symbolism, speaking to the world of glory, majesty, and power. Who could ever forget Penny Mordaunt, in her capacity as Lord President of the Privy Council, standing holding the Sword of State? Her role, and every part of the ceremonial and pomp of the day was carefully designed to reflect the historical importance of the occasion.

But the king that we celebrate today bears no resemblance to this kind of outward show of majesty. Unlike our earthly king, who was born into a life of privilege, Christ the King comes to us in the lowliest form. Born in a stable in a poor and troubled land, he began his life as a refugee in Egypt, and grew up as an ordinary boy in an ordinary working family. He lived most of his life in obscurity until he began his mission to open up the love of God the Father and knowledge of the Kingdom of Heaven to the people around him. Beginning a movement that would spread and grow throughout the world, calling everyone to hear his message of love, forgiveness, and redemption.

This king is also a shepherd. As Jesus speaks to his followers, he paints a picture of the Son of Man as one of the lowliest people in an agricultural society. A shepherd working among his flock; getting dirty and sweaty as he sorts out the sheep from the goats. What sort of king is this?

Jesus Christ is not just some sort of storybook prince, clothed in rich fabrics and wearing a golden crown. His throne is not some earthly seat of power. He it is who sits at God’s right
hand in the kingdom of heaven, from whence, as we say in the creed, he will come to judge the living and the dead. That is, at the end of days, he will judge everyone who has ever lived, and all of us who are alive today, and everyone yet to be born into this world.

And it is in this reading from Matthew that we learn on what basis this judgement will be made. We are to be judged by how we treat others; how we obey Jesus’s commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves. The instructions are clear: feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, nurse the sick, visit the prisoner. In other words, show your love to your neighbour in those acts of loving kindness, because in doing so, you will be showing your love for Jesus himself.

Worse, when we neglect to follow Jesus’s teaching, when we cruelly and indifferently turn our backs on those who need us, we are showing cruelty and indifference to our Heavenly King himself. How could we bear to be so cruel to the one who loves us so faithfully?

Jesus loves us, and he lives in us, and in our actions. He calls us his sisters and brothers. He is part of us just as we are part of him. We are the members of his family to which the reading refers. This does not just refer to those of us gathered in church today, but everyone throughout the world and throughout time. Every person ever born is precious to him and so, whatever we do for or to our brothers and sisters in the world, we are doing for and to Jesus.

We must make no mistake. This message is important and is meant for all of us. We must be loving and kind, careful and faithful in our dealings with others. It is not just a case of doing no harm, we must, as Christians, purposefully seek to do good. Although we may not actively or deliberately hurt other people, we need to remember that we can hurt them by neglect or ignorance. In the words attributed to the philosopher Edmund Burke, ‘the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.’

It is through ignoring or despising those in need that we actively hurt Jesus himself, and this puts us into the misery and darkness of everlasting banishment from the Kingdom of Heaven. On the other hand, the reward for treating our fellow creatures with love and generosity, loving our neighbour as ourselves, is nothing less than eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven in the company of Jesus and his Father.

And that rich and happy reward is, to paraphrase Shakespeare’s Hamlet, a consummation most devoutly to be wished!

Amen.

Suggested intercessions

Let us pray to God, King of heaven and Lord of all the world.

Bless the Church, the Body of Christ, and make her worthy to claim him as her head. Guide your ministers to be good shepherds of their flocks, faithful in word and works.

[Specific petitions for Church, clergy, ministers, congregations …………]
Lord, in your mercy; hear our prayer.

Spread through all creation your spirit of love and care, Bless those who work to relieve suffering around the world. May all the nations acknowledge Christ as King of kings and Lord of Lords.

[Specific petitions for the environment, the peace of world, nations, governments, etc ........]

Lord, in your mercy; hear our prayer.

Inspire our community with concern for all those in need in our towns and villages. Help us to spread to our neighbours and those with whom we work the good news of Christ as Lord.

[Specific petitions for local societies, charities, family and children’s organisations, schools, clubs, etc ........]

Lord, in your mercy; hear our prayer.

Have mercy on all who are in want of food, or drink, or clothing, all those in hospital and hospices, and those in prison. Through human hands, bring them the sure relief that comes from your love and power.

[Specific petitions for relief agencies, organisations fighting for human rights, hospital and prison staff, refugees, prisoners of conscience, etc ........]

Lord, in your mercy; hear our prayer.

Have mercy on all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit. Give to the suffering the comfort of your presence. Heal the broken bodies, bring peace to the suffering minds, calm the troubled spirits, and wipe away all tears and pain.

[Specific petitions for the sick in body, mind, or spirit ........]

Lord, in your mercy; hear our prayer.

We pray for those who have been called from this world to be with Christ. By his kingship of the living and the dead, grant them rest.

[Specific petitions for the departed, the bereaved, year’s mind ........]

Lord, in your mercy; hear our prayer.

We pray with confidence in the name of Christ the King.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

Adapted from: Leading Intercessions, Raymond Chapman (Canterbury Press, 2006)
**Suggested hymns/songs**

All hail the power of Jesus’ name
All people that on earth do dwell
Christ triumphant, ever reigning
Faithful shepherd, feed me
Let all the world in every corner sing
Morning glory, starlit sky
Rejoice, the Lord is King
The Lord is my shepherd
Thou didst leave thy throne
When I needed a neighbour