

Ezekiel 34.11-17

God called Ezekiel to prophesy against the leaders of Israel, who'd been bad shepherds, feeding themselves rather than their sheep and exercising power instead of caring for the sick or lost. As a result, sheep were scattered, and some eaten by wild animals. God steps in as a good shepherd, keeping the whole flock in view, rescuing the lost and watching over the healthy.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who tells Peter to 'feed his lambs' and 'tend his sheep' (John 21:15-17) and the Holy Spirit enables the apostles to be shepherds of the flock '...which he purchased with his own blood' (Acts 20:28).

The Ordinal reminds bishops that they: 'are called to serve and care for the flock of Christ... to love and pray for those committed to their charge, knowing their people and being known by them.' Priests share in this ministry of shepherding the flock and diaconal ministry picks up God's special concern for the weak and powerless, the sick and the lost. The flock is precious!

Jesus is of course the chief shepherd (Hebrews 13:20) and as today's psalm reminds us: 'The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want' (Psalm 23:1).

O Sing unto the Lord

The Solemnity of Christ the King is a relatively recent addition to the Calendar, having been instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925, originally observed on the last Sunday in October and then moved in 1970 to the final Sunday of the Church Year. Pope Pius was keen to emphasise the place of Christ as our ultimate King in response to the growing tide of secularism and nationalism throughout Europe; the wonderful hymn *Hail Redeemer, King divine* expresses these very sentiments. The words are by Patrick Brennan (1877-1952) an Irish priest of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, known as the 'Redemptorists'. The usual tune is *King Divine*, written for these words by Charles Rigby (1901-1962), a Lancastrian. Different hymnals have printed varied verses, and some have sadly omitted the wonderful final refrain: Sing all tongues, let none be dumb / Sacred Heart, thy kingdom come! / To the King of ages then / Honour, glory, love. Amen. As we end the Church Year and look towards the Advent season, we keep these words in our hearts and minds and pray for God's kingdom to come, on earth, as it is in heaven.

Prayers to Remember

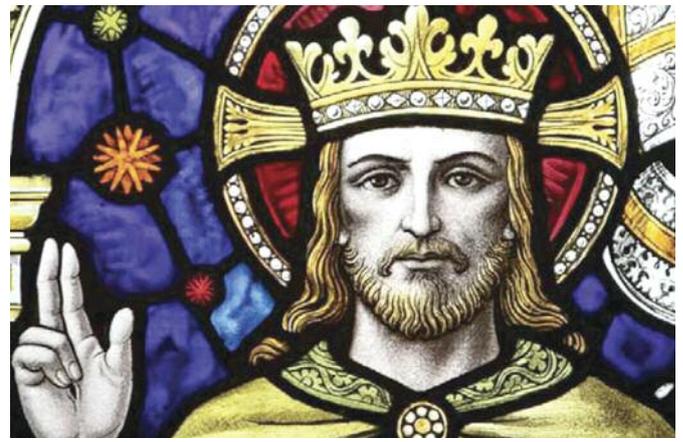
Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Collect for the Sunday next before Advent (*Stir up Sunday*), *Book of Common Prayer* (1662)

22nd November
2020

Christ the King

The Shepherd King



Most of us make resolutions for the calendar New Year, but normally all that happens if we fail is that we continue to be less fit and slender than we'd like!

Today's feast marks the end of the liturgical year. Unlike earthly kings in the Bible who often use and abuse their power, Jesus's kingship is focused on both judgment *and* protection, reflected in the link between being a king *and* a shepherd – the judge and the pastor.

The gospel reading makes it clear that we can't shrug our shoulders and say: 'that's just the way things are' because we will be held accountable. Both the sheep and the goats are surprised about where they stand before God. He knows the secrets of our hearts and can judge with greater insight and justice than any human court, but exercised with mercy and love. Christ uses his kingship for protection and care – he is our Good Shepherd who wants to lead his sheep to safety.

As individuals and congregations, we must reflect honestly on how effectively we demonstrate God's love. We'll sometimes fail, but Christ still loves us, and the Holy Spirit will inspire and equip us to do his work.