

## [Spirituality](#)



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I'm sure that all of us are very used to celebrating this feast of Christ the King. It's been a part of the church's liturgy for almost 100 years now. Yet, it's a strange thing that we celebrate such a feast. You may remember, during the life of Jesus, there were a couple of occasions when that huge crowd of people were following him and they felt he could overthrow the Roman empire, the occupiers of their land. They wanted to make him a king. He went into hiding immediately.

## **The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe**

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

Psalms 23:1-2, 2-3, 5-6

1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Matthew 25:31-46

[Full text of the readings](#)

He refused to accept the kingship. Even when he was on trial for his life and Pilot said, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say it," but he would not say it. So it is somewhat an anomaly that we celebrate such a feast. He rejected the title. That's why it's very important for us to understand what kind of a king Jesus is, the king we celebrate when we give him that title. Our first lesson today becomes very important because in the Jewish tradition, the king was thought of as a shepherd, a shepherd who really cared for his flock.

In that first lesson, Ezekiel criticizes harshly the leaders of the chosen people because they are failing to serve the poor and the weak, the vulnerable. They're taking care of themselves and letting the people drift away. Ezekiel promises them that God will do something about it. What Ezekiel promises is indeed, God says this: "I (God) will care for my sheep, watch over them. As a shepherd looks after his flock when he finds them scattered, so will I watch over my sheep and gather them from all the places where they are scattered."

How did God fulfill that promise? He fulfills it especially in Jesus. If you look at Chapter 10 of St. John's Gospel, there's a beautiful passage about Jesus: "I am the good shepherd." Jesus, Son of God, is the fulfillment of the promise God makes

through Ezekiel and other prophets. "I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and they know me." He's in a relationship with them; he loves them. "I lay down my life for my sheep. ... A greater love than this no one has than to give one's life for another."

Jesus becomes the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd who, in the Jewish tradition, would be a shepherd-king. So when we acknowledge or proclaim our reverence through Jesus as king, we're really proclaiming him as the Good Shepherd who cares for the sheep, who knows them. "I know mine and they know me." How does that get carried out in the church today? If we listen to the Gospel lesson, it's heard very clearly. Jesus tells us that he is present in the least of those in our midst: the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, those who lack housing, those in prison, those who are sick.

Whenever you reached out to them as he did — that's what he did during his life; he reached out to the poor, the thirsty, the hungry, the homeless, and he drew them in. They were his friends. When we think about how Jesus related to the poor and the hungry and the thirsty, it's very important to remember that with him it was always something very personal. He never cured people in crowds. He wanted to have an immediate contact with the person with whom he was relating.

There are many instances in the Gospels. One of the ones that I find most beautiful is when Jesus is on his final journey toward Jerusalem and he's passing through the city of Jericho. There's a huge crowd following him. On the fringe of the crowd, someone cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" It's a blind man, a beggar, poor. He had no way to care for himself. He was blind and very poor and vulnerable. What did the people do? They tried to quiet him.

They were saying, in a sense, "Who are you? Why do you think he would care about you? You're nobody" But Jesus stops and he calls the man over to him. Then what I think is most beautiful, Jesus doesn't presume to know what the man needs; he respects him and says to him, "What do you want?" Of course the man says, "That I may see." Jesus gives him his sight. Not only his sight, physically, but also the sight of faith where he came to know Jesus. He falls down and worships him as Son of God.

Jesus always was very personal in his relationships, especially with the poor and the vulnerable. That's what the Gospel lesson is telling us. If we want to acknowledge

Jesus as our king, we need to acknowledge him as a shepherd-king who reaches out to the poor, the vulnerable, and we try to imitate him. As we heard in the Gospel, that's what we'll be judged on for our whole life. "When I was hungry, you gave me to eat," and so on. "Whenever you did it to one of these, the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me."

In our church leadership today, especially in Pope Francis, we have a Bishop of Rome, head of the whole Roman Catholic Church who is so like Jesus in this regard. In fact, last Sunday when we here celebrated a great saint of the poor, Blessed Solanus [Casey], Pope Francis in Rome was celebrating a day that he had declared, and from now on, every year in the church, the 33rd Sunday of the year will be a day of the poor. He spoke about it when he celebrated the Mass for 500 people, poor people from the streets of Rome and those who helped them, and then he had lunch with all of them last Sunday.

When he did this, he made this proclamation that every year now on the 33rd Sunday of the year, we will celebrate the Catholic Church's World Day of the Poor. In the proclamation that he used to proclaim this, he quoted from St. John Chrysostom. This is a beautiful quote. He says, "If you want to honor the body of Christ, do not scorn it when it is naked; do not honor the Eucharistic Christ (at a celebration like this) with silk vestments, and then, leaving the church, neglect the other Christ suffering from cold and nakedness."

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Isn't that so easy that we could do something like that? Yes, we celebrate beautifully. Last Saturday's celebration was marvelous — 70,000 people celebrating a poor monk who reached out to the poor. But we have to do it more every day. Pope Francis says one of the primary goals of this day is to help Catholics answer the question: who are the poor today? Where are they around me in the area in which I live? When I see them (It's not hard; we all know that now.), find ways to share and create relationships with them.

In other words, as Pope Francis has said so often as he has been the Bishop of Rome, go out into the peripheries and find where the poor are, relate to them, serve them, and then you will be honoring Jesus Christ, our King, the Shepherd-King who reached out to the poor. Then every poor person will find Jesus. "When I was hungry

you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty you gave me to drink." When? "Whenever you did it to one of the least of my brothers and sisters you did it to me." That's what we need to do as followers of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Son of Mary, and now we celebrate as King of the universe.

[Homily given Nov. 25 at St. Philomena Church in Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]