

**November 22, 2020 | The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe**

[EZ 34:11-12, 15-17](#)

[PS 23: 1-3. 5-6](#)

[1 COR 15:20-26, 28](#)

[MT 25:31-46](#)

*By Dianne Bergant, CSA*

This solemnity offers us a very challenging theme upon which to reflect, namely, kingship. For many people, kingship evokes images of oppressive domination, unearned opulence, and an undeserved sense of superiority. They cringe before aspects of royal protocol that seem to demean them. Perhaps originating in an experience of kingship in their history, such an understanding is quite distasteful. Both the reading from Ezekiel and the verses from the psalm sketch an entirely different image of kingship.

In ancient Israel, the king was characterized as a shepherd who was attentive to the flock, including those sheep who wandered away. This characterization was probably a vestige of the people's nomadic past. They would have experienced how attached a shepherd can be to the flock. As for the sheep, it is well known that they can indeed recognize the sound of their shepherd. This relationship was often quite intimate. The last verse of the Ezekiel reading links that passage to the gospel reading: "I will judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats" (v.17). The text states that there will be judgment, but it will be conducted by one who has the kind-heartedness of a shepherd.

In the gospel reading, the Son of Man appears in glory and seated on a throne. From there, as a shepherd-king, he separates his flock and passes judgment on them. By what standard is the flock judged? By the standard of social justice. Have they cared for those among them who were hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, ill, in prison? They are further told by the Son of Man, who here judges as the shepherd-king, that to care for those in need is to care for him. The nature of the intimacy between this shepherd-king, this Son of Man, and his flock is clarified in startling terms: "Whatever you did for one of these...you did for me." Those who acted in this way are invited into the kingdom prepared by the Father.

One might wonder how we got from Christ the King to matters of social justice. The Christ, the Son of Man, is a shepherd-king, who is tenderly attentive to his flock. The person standing at the road intersection with a plea for food scribbled on a scrap of cardboard, the immigrant family fleeing their home and seeking a better life, the broken person who has been bought and sold for purposes of work or for abuse, those helplessly shackled in poverty - this is the flock of the shepherd-king; these are the sheep he holds close to his heart. He is a shepherd-king who has identified with his flock. If we want to get close to him, we will have to go through them. If we seek to honor him, we must attend to the needs of the others. The kingdom is populated by people who have learned to care for the flock as the shepherd-king does. As we celebrate this shepherd-king, we must also commit ourselves to caring for the needy people of his flock.

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