



Come and See!

November 26, 2017

The Word...

“I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest,” says the Lord GOD.
(from Ez 34:11-12, 15-17)

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. *(from Ps 23)*

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, he will sit upon his glorious throne,
and all the nations will be assembled before him.
And he will separate them one from another,
as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.
Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father.
Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”
(from Mt 25:31-46)

Pondering the Word ...

Today is the Feast of Christ the King (Christ the King Sunday), observed in the Roman Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations. And frankly, it’s an image of Christ with which I struggle. I always think of the story when Jesus, afraid the crowds will try to make him king, withdraws to the mountains. (Jn 6:15) Is being a king, bedecked in fine robes and gold, what Jesus wanted? I don’t think so.

But the image portrayed in the readings today provides another view of Christ as king: a shepherd, a guide, a protector, a calm and restful presence for those willing to follow his lead; those willing to heed, not the golden kings of the world, but a simple, compassionate shepherd-king; those ready to go out with him to find and tend to those who are lost.

No matter how many times I encounter today’s passage from Matthew, I am still in awe of the words Christ speaks. They shake me to my core and make me take a good hard look at my sinfulness—not the traditional “thou shall not” sins of commission—but my sins of omission: the times I have turned away from the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the ill, the prisoner; the times I have allowed the glitter and bright lights of the world blind me to the need right in front of me.

This is exactly the lesson Pope Francis is trying to get across to us: it is not that the law, and the “thou shalt nots” don’t matter—Jesus told us he did not come to abolish the law. And it’s not that the goats in this story sin because they fail to recognize Christ in the poor—remember, “When did we see you?” was the question asked by both the sheep and the goats. The goats’ sin is being unaware, being blind. The sheep inherit the kingdom by doing out of the goodness of their hearts—not out of obligation, not out of a promise of eternal life. They give and serve out of compassion and love. Just like Christ, our Shepherd-King.

Living the Word...

I encourage you to take time and read today’s Scripture with new, open eyes. Pay attention to the words and what they mean in and for your life. Take them to heart as we embark on our journey to Bethlehem next Sunday. Don’t let the bling and bright lights of the shopping season blind you. Find hope and joy in the opportunities we have to serve. Praise and glorify Christ, our compassionate Shepherd-King, by your life.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Nov 27: *"I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest; for those others have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood."* (Lk 21:1-4)

This gospel story is about quality versus quantity. It's also about trust in God. Jesus is not judging the wealthy who put more money into the treasury. They may be very good, generous people, but we know they give from their surplus. They are not wanting for their next meal. The widow gives from her poverty. She has to trust that God will provide for her. The amount is not what matters; it is the quality of the gift. Ask yourself: What where is my "poverty?" Time? Courage? Tolerance? What would it look like if I were to give from that place where I am poor? Do I trust God will provide what I need?

Nov 28: *"Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky."* (Lk 21:5-11)

How many times have we seen such calamities occur? It's no wonder people continue to predict the end of the world and the coming of God's kingdom. How are we to interpret Jesus' words 2,000 years later when eclipses, famines, and earthquakes happen on a regular basis? Perhaps we need to go back to his words from Luke 17: "The kingdom of God is among you." God's kingdom is here, today. Right now. Each day, we're called to give an accounting of how we are living in the kingdom. Jesus warns us later this week: Don't be caught unaware, drowsy, complacent. Don't sit around waiting for "the big one" to start preparing. God's kingdom is here.

Nov 29: *"This is the writing that was inscribed... MENE, God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it; TEKEL, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting."* (Dn 5: 1-6, 13-17, 23)

It's the day before Thanksgiving in the US, so forgive me, but I couldn't resist the pun about being weighed on the scales and being found wanting! Pun aside, there is a serious message in this passage. Daniel is reading "the writing on the wall" for King Belshazzar who has defiled the temple vessels. His idolatry of gold, silver, and fine food and drink have made him a glutton for worldly gods. He is found wanting in things that matter in God's kingdom. This is not to say we shouldn't celebrate and give thanks for God's bounty and partake of that bounty. But as you approach the season of Advent, take some time to assess how you might fare being weighed of God's scales: mercy, compassion, generosity, hospitality to the stranger, and working for justice.

Nov 30: *"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news! But not everyone has heeded the good news; Thus faith comes from what is heard....But I ask, did they not hear?"* (Rom 10:9-18)

Paul is talking about the Jews who have failed to heed the Good News, and also of the beauty of the disciples who have faced hardships preaching Christ. He says, "Faith comes from what is heard." When Jesus preached the Good News, he had a great grasp on the audience to which he was speaking. With the elders, he engaged in rabbinical debate. When he spoke to the poor, he told parables the people could relate to and understand. He was able to reach people where they were and so give them a chance to really hear and listen to what he was saying. As we go about preaching—mostly by our actions—we will not reach everyone. But let's model our approach after Jesus by meeting others where they are, not where we think they ought to be.

Dec 1: *This (one) had eyes like a man, and a mouth that spoke arrogantly.* (Dn 7:2-14)

The visions in the Book of Daniel are as pleasant and relatable as those in Revelations! It take a lot of weeding for me to tease out meaning not tied to the books' historical context (2nd century, BC, late 1st century, AD, respectively.) But the phrase, "a mouth that spoke arrogantly," is a theme that runs throughout all of Scripture. The haughty, the arrogant, the boastful...they may rage and they may reign for a time, but in the end, their ilk will be defeated by the Son of Man. Good News and words of hope, indeed!

Dec 2: *Beware your hearts do not become drowsy from... the anxieties of daily life.* (Lk 21:34-36)

Yes, I've left out the carousing and drunkenness. Even as we enter the season to eat, drink and be merry, I'd guess most of you don't fall prey to much carousing. But I don't know many who escape the anxieties of daily life. Be good to yourself as we enter Advent, a special time of waiting in hope. Be present to the light shining afar in the darkness of daily worries and tasks so that you will be ready to greet the (infant) Son of Man.