

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

Ezekiel = ee-ZEE-kee-uhl

An expressive reading that elaborates the powerful metaphor of God as shepherd and believers as the sheep in his flock.

Note the emphatic repetitions of "I myself."

Note the rhythm of each line, beginning with a noun and ending with a verb for what God will do.

The reading concludes with a mysterious claim.

LECTIONARY #160

READING I Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

Thus says the **Lord GOD**:

I myself will look after and tend my sheep.

As a **shepherd** tends his **flock**

when he **finds** himself among his **scattered** sheep,
so will I **tend** my **sheep**.

I will **rescue** them from **every** place where they were **scattered**
when it was **cloudy** and **dark**.

I myself will **pasture** my **sheep**;

I myself will give them **rest**, says the **Lord GOD**.

The **lost** I will seek **out**,

the **strayed** I will **bring back**,

the **injured** I will **bind up**,

the **sick** I will **heal**,

but the **sleek** and the **strong** I will **destroy**,
shepherding them **rightly**.

As for **you**, my **sheep**, says the **Lord GOD**,

I will **judge** between **one** **sheep** and **another**,
between **rams** and **goats**.

READING I

There are many aspects of our culture that attempt to overshadow the sovereignty of Christ in the world, yet today's readings draw our attention to the true power of God that will shine forth in the second coming of Christ and the judgment that will be placed on all peoples. This is an important reminder for us who live in the world: we belong to Christ, not to the ever-changing whims of culture, and must live in a way that reflects our citizenship in his kingdom.

Today's first reading comes from the longer parable of the shepherds (Ezekiel

34:1-31) in the Book of Ezekiel. In the verses that immediately precede this reading, Ezekiel delivers a woe oracle—that is, a warning, against the shepherds of Israel who have been taking advantage of the sheep, ruling harshly against them and not caring for the sick, injured, or lost among them. The metaphor of kings and leaders as shepherds and their constituencies as sheep had long been in use in the Mediterranean world, so people knew well what Ezekiel was talking about. Here, Ezekiel is blaming the king and religious leaders of Judea for the fate of God's peo-

ple, scattered about in exile and metaphorically eaten by wild animals.

As we pick up today's reading, we hear Ezekiel giving voice to God's word against the shepherds of Israel, who did such great harm to God's people. The imagery of God as shepherd is very evocative and can be seen in other Old Testament passages (for example, see Genesis 48:15; Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10). Imagine God collecting his scattered sheep that have been battered and bruised in exile, feeding the hungry ones, tending the sick among them, and providing a place for

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 23:1-2, 2-3, 5-6 (1)

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose.

Beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.

He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.

READING II 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

**Christ has been raised from the dead,
the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**

For since **death** came through **man**,
the **resurrection** of the **dead** came **also** through **man**.

For just as in **Adam** **all die**,
so too in **Christ** shall **all** be brought to **life**,
but **each one** in **proper order**:

Christ the **firstfruits**;
then, at his **coming**, **those** who belong to **Christ**;
then comes the **end**,

when he **hands over** the **kingdom** to his **God** and **Father**,
when he has **destroyed** every **sovereignty**
and every **authority** and **power**.

For he must **reign** until he has put **all his enemies** under
his **feet**.

The **last enemy** to be **destroyed** is **death**.

When **everything** is **subjected** to him,
then the **Son himself** will **also** be **subjected**
to the one who **subjected everything** to him,
so that **God** may be **all in all**.

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhnz

An urgent reading from Paul, no less complex for its urgency. Pace your proclamation; there is a lot to absorb here.

Emphasis in these two lines on "man."

Note the sequence of the "proper order" in which death will be defeated.

TO KEEP IN MIND

Use the pitch and volume of your voice to gain the attention of the assembly.

Pause slightly after "death."

Slow your pace slightly at "all in all."

them to rest in safety after their long and harrowing ordeal. But not every sheep in a flock is good. The "sleek and the strong" is an allusion to members of the sheepfold who, like the bad shepherds, take advantage of the others for their own benefit. Immediately following this reading is an oracle about separating the bad sheep from the good, the rams from the goats (Ezekiel 34:17-24). Thus, this God who shepherds like a good and great king also judges justly. In summary, God says that he will take the sheep away from the bad shepherds and

take charge of the sheep himself, undoing the damage that the bad shepherds did.

READING II Our second reading is from

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, and it is part of his much longer teaching on resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15:1-58). Briefly, he argues that Christians who believe in Christ's resurrection must also believe that they will be resurrected bodily. Otherwise, there would be no triumph over death and sin would not be defeated.

In this reading, Paul presents Jesus as the firstfruits of those who are deceased. The term "firstfruits" represents the first and best of the harvest offered to God as a sacrifice in consecration of the entire harvest to God. To further illustrate this theme, Paul uses a method of biblical interpretation called typology, which compares an Old Testament person or event with a New Testament person or event, the former being merely a blueprint of the latter. Here Paul describes Adam as a type of Jesus Christ: Adam brought sin and death into the world for all humankind, while Jesus Christ

A reading in which, through a kind of visionary parable, Jesus reveals an apocalyptic vision of judgment. It involves repetitions that serve to reinforce the qualities of the vision.

Be attentive to the rhythms here.

These questions are asked in earnest.

brought life into the world for all peoples. Paul explains that this sacrifice of firstfruits begins with Jesus' resurrection and comes to its fullness with his return as the exalted Lord. When he comes, all who belong to Christ will also be resurrected. Then, having assumed his role as king, the risen Christ will destroy all other sovereignties and subject competing authorities to his power, until he destroys death itself. Then he will turn over his kingdom to God who is Lord over all, so that "God may be all in all." What a powerful image of God's peaceful kingdom to come!

GOSPEL Matthew 25:31–46

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus said to his disciples:

"When the **Son of Man** comes in his glory,
and **all the angels with him**,
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**.

For I was **hungry** and you gave me **food**,
I was **thirsty** and you gave me **drink**,
a **stranger** and you **welcomed me**,
naked and you **clothed me**,
ill and you **cared** for me,
in **prison** and you **visited me**.'

Then the **righteous** will **answer** him and say,
'**Lord**, when did we see you **hungry** and **feed** you,
or **thirsty** and **give** you **drink**?

When did we see you a **stranger** and **welcome** you,
or **naked** and **clothe** you?

When did we see you **ill** or in **prison**, and **visit** you?'

And the **king** will say to them in **reply**,
'**Amen**, I say to you, **whatever you did**
for one of the **least brothers** of **mine**, you **did** for **me**.'

GOSPEL

The Gospel reading for today gives us important insights into the nature of Christ's kingship and its relevance for our daily lives. This teaching is the last in a series of parables and teachings on the return of the risen Christ in the end time that are found in Matthew 24–25, after which Matthew unfolds for us the story of Jesus' arrest, crucifixion, death, and resurrection.

This teaching, which biblical scholars categorize as an apocalyptic discourse, has no parallel in the other Gospels. The word *apocalypse* means "revelation," and it usu-

ally refers to the revelation of heavenly realities to a human recipient through visions or auditions. The heavenly reality being revealed here is judgment day, when the righteous are separated out for reward and the wicked are separated out for judgment. The phrase "Son of Man" possibly has its origins in Daniel 7 or Zechariah 14, but, in the Gospels, it is spoken only by Jesus and applied to himself. Thus, when Matthew describes Jesus as saying, "when the Son of Man comes in his glory," Jesus is talking about himself and referring to the parousia, his return in glory after his resurrection.

Once again, be attentive to the rhythms.

Then he will say to those on his left,
 'Depart from me, you accursed,
 into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.
 For I was hungry and you gave me no food,
 I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
 a stranger and you gave me no welcome,
 naked and you gave me no clothing,
 ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.'

Once again, the question is asked in earnest.

Then they will answer and say,
 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty
 or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison,
 and not minister to your needs?'
 He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you,
 what you did not do for one of these least ones,
 you did not do for me.'
 And these will go off to eternal punishment,
 but the righteous to."

Note the clear contrast between "eternal punishment" and "eternal life."

The metaphors of the kingly Christ as both shepherd and judge are present in this text. The risen Christ comes to sit on his heavenly throne with all the nations—Jews and Gentiles—gathered around him, representing his universal kingship. Then, as a shepherd, he separates sheep from goats. The Greek word that is translated as "sheep" here can mean any small grazing animal, even small cattle. The Greek word that is translated here as "goat" is the diminutive of *erion*, meaning "wool," as in "little woolly creatures." Perhaps they are less desirable because they are not fully grown or have

not reached their full potential. The sheep or the mature grazers are invited into the kingdom that has been prepared for them. The goats or "little woolly creatures" are told to depart from Christ's throne. Jesus even calls them "accursed," because, when it comes time for the final judgment, there are no do-overs; you are either mature and ready to enter God's kingdom or you are not. And what is the measure of readiness? It is that you perform the corporal works of mercy from your heart, with pure motive and without self-flattery or desire to curry favor with someone. Notice the similarities

between Jesus' criteria for admission to the kingdom and the seven corporal works of mercy—feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick and prisoners, burying the dead, and giving alms to the poor. C.C.