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Christ the King, Year B, catechist

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Wed, 09/26/2012 - 20:00

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for the session, read all the readings:

Daniel 7:13-14

Psalm 93:1, 1-2, 5

Revelation 1:5-8

John 18, 33-37

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading which appealed to you?

Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the "Word in Liturgy" and "Catholic Doctrine" sections. These pieces give you background for what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word in Liturgy

On this last Sunday of the liturgical year, the Church celebrates the feast of Christ the King. Instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 to combat the growing secularism and atheism of his time, it is one of the so-called "idea feasts" that do not celebrate an event in the life of Jesus but rather some aspect of his identity. In it we recognize and honor Christ as ruler and universal shepherd.

The original feast of Christ the King is the Ascension, in which the Church celebrates the exalted Christ, crowned with glory at the right hand of God. Today's celebration should remind us of that more important feast as the liturgical year comes to a close.

The establishment of a monarchy in Israel was initially resisted and seen as a betrayal of the more ancient ideal of a theocracy with Yahweh as sole king. Eventually, a king was established but a certain ambivalence toward the institution of the monarchy can be traced throughout the history of the chosen people. David, the shepherd king, became the idealized figure of the monarchy, but the tradition maintained its awareness that Yahweh must always be the real king over his people (cf. Psalms 23, 74, and 80). The repeated failures and infidelities of the kings in both north and south only reinforced this tradition of suspicion of earthly kings.

During the Babylonian exile, Ezekiel issued a scathing denunciation of the false shepherds who had led the people astray (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Then, in what must surely have been words that brought relief and hope to the exiles, he delivers the Lord's promise to return, to shepherd the people once again himself. The mention of judgment (v. 17) adds an eschatological dimension that makes the text all the more fitting for this last day of the liturgical year. The choice of psalmody is obvious in light of Ezekiel's use of the shepherd imagery.

In today's reading from 1 Corinthians we can see how Paul's thought about the parousia has



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evolved in comparison to what we have been reading during the last five weeks in his first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul realizes that Christ's reign has already commenced, that it is in fact coterminous with the age of the Church, i.e., from his ascension until the parousia. This reign, already begun, is nonetheless incomplete (remember Romans 8 and Paul's references to the "groaning" of all creation).

There are still enemies to be destroyed ("Christ must reign until God has put all enemies under his feet," v. 25), but the resurrection of Christ is our proof that the final outcome is not in doubt. The Adam-Christ typology was an important part of Paul's developing understanding of the importance of the resurrection for the believer, and especially how we participate in Christ's resurrection through faith and baptism. Note the liturgical context of "first fruits," a term associated with Jewish cultic usage. If Christ's resurrection makes him the "first fruits," then the entire harvest--all of us--is consecrated to the Lord and will someday enjoy fullness of glory with him.

The judgment scene in Matthew 25 is unique to his gospel and forms the climactic conclusion to his Eschatological Discourse. Only here in all of the gospels does Jesus ascribe to himself the status of a king rendering judgment. The criteria of that judgment are most striking: They are the simple acts of love and kindness directed to the "little ones" of this world. To have done these everyday works of goodness is to have touched Jesus himself; to have neglected to do them is to have neglected the needs of Christ, an omission worthy of condemnation. This implies that doing the works of goodness called for here is already to have gained access to the reign of God and to have chosen not to act in love is already a choice not to belong to God's reign.

Catholic Doctrine

To Judge the Living and the Dead

This phrase from the Nicene Creed expresses our Catholic belief that Christ who died and was raised up again to new life has been given the right as our Redeemer to judge the works and hearts of all (CCC 679). Christ has ascended to heaven and participates in God's power and authority and we acknowledge him as Lord not only of the universe but of the unfolding of history itself (CCC 668). Indeed, in Christ all of human history is summed up and fulfilled and, as the Second Vatican Council affirmed, "he is the key, the center and the purpose of the whole of [our] history . . ." (GS 10).

We also believe that the kingdom over which the Lord gloriously reigns is present in a mysterious way on earth in the Church (CCC 669). And while evil--definitively defeated by the cross and resurrection--still resists this reign, the final fulfillment will be accomplished for we are in the last days before final judgment (CCC 671). Thus, the Second Vatican Council taught, "Already the final age of the world is with us (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11) and the renewal of the world is irrevocably under way; it is even now anticipated in a certain real way, for the Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real though imperfect. However, until there be realized new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells (cf. 2 Peter 3:13) the pilgrim Church, in its sacraments and institutions, which belong to this present age, carries the mark of this world which will pass, and she herself takes her place among the creatures which groan and travail yet and await the revelation of the [children] of God (cf. Romans 8:19-22)" (LG 48).

This revelation that we await is the judgment Christ the King will render. There are two judgments



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that occur, particular and final. Particular judgment refers to the judging of the moral quality of one's life immediately after death (CCC 1022) and Christ determines whether the person has chosen fundamentally to either cooperate with God's grace or how one has chosen to reject God's grace. Accordingly, judgment is rendered and the person merits heaven, purgatory, or hell. Final judgment refers to that end time of history when Christ will return to this world bringing the fullness of the kingdom and sum up everything by passing definitive judgment on all people, nations, and history itself (CCC 679).

How does Christ judge, especially in light of the gospel message (John 3:17) that he has come not to condemn but that all might have life and be saved? The form of judgment is a revelation from the Lord who is the fullness of God's revelation among us. Each person will be revealed in this judgment and, thus, the judging has already been achieved by the way in which one lived. Hence, this feast's gospel image of the separation of sheep and goats indicating how one has lived in accord (or not) with the kingdom imperative of loving one's neighbor.

The final or last judgment also constitutes God's final word on all of history. Jesus Christ, the living Word, will reveal God's glorious triumph over evil and at the same time manifest the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation. Till then, we believe that Christ is the hope of Israel and we, the Church, continue the Pentecost preaching of Peter that all embrace the Lord Jesus and his kingdom (CCC 674). Till then, we pass through trial and faith-shaking events--and yet we hold firm in the Lord (CCC 675). Only through this time of tribulation and final passover will the Church enter into the glory of the kingdom (CCC 677) when Christ will reveal our full stature as children of the Most High "so that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

How then, in the light of our Catholic belief about Christ rendering judgment, are we to understand the images contained in the Book of Revelation about the end times? The images found in this last book of the New Testament are one way that the early Christian Church expressed its faith in the God who promises to deliver us, especially in times of persecution and trial as experienced by the early Christians. The message of this apocalyptic literature is not necessarily to be found in literal acceptance of its surface meaning. Rather, its meaning is perceived through eyes of faith informed by the Church. Thus, our destiny is firmly anchored in Jesus Christ's saving life, death, and resurrection, unlocked for us believers by the Church. There is no other hope or glorious summation to the hearts and lives of all but that which is found in Christ who is our King.

Catholic Culture

On this feast of Christ the King, the Church prays, "As king [Christ] claims dominion over all creation, that he may present to you, his heavenly Father, an eternal and universal kingdom: a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace" (*Sacramentary*, Preface 51).

The anchor was one of the most popular early Christian symbols connected to Christ and use of it refers to Hebrews 6:18-19. It is seen on early Christian graves and seals and was recommended by Clement of Alexandria (c. 200) as an image suitable for use in seal rings. The crossbar of the anchor also was understood as a symbol of Christ's cross (OxA&A 16). Sometimes, artisans depicted dolphins twined around the anchor (perhaps a sign of humanity's being saved from drowning in the seas of sin by Christ). Some modern Catholic medals shaped as anchors are also inscribed with the names of the theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity)--those virtues from God that form our lives as believers and thus "anchor" us.



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St. John of the Cross (d. 1569), mystic, preacher, and reformer, wrote, "At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love" (*Dichos de luz y amor* 64).

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