

Solemnity of Christ the King, November 29, 2020 (Year A), 9:30 AM
Week Three: What are you doing for others?

SCREEN: The Crown

Last Sunday, Netflix released Season Four of The Crown, a bright spot, at least for me, in an otherwise dark year – and of course I guiltily admit I binge-watched all ten episodes over three days! The Crown tells the story of the British Royal Family over the past 70 years beginning when Queen Elizabeth was a young princess and eventually arriving in the present day at the end of Season Six. Previous seasons were so impressive with incredible acting and great story lines. Imagining life as a Royal can be a form of escape from the routine of everyday life. And yet the new season hasn't been the welcome escape I personally hoped it would be and the reason is not totally clear. Though there is a great deal of sadness and unhappy people, the story is still compelling, the acting impeccable with beautiful settings, landscapes and wonderful production values.

So why is it different watching The Crown this year? It's because I'm different – life is different – our world is different from last year. In 2020, a year that seems endless, it's not much fun to watch a show that depicts a

monarchy so out of touch with the lives of the people that it's supposed to serve. We are watching Rulers whose privilege and lifestyle blind them from the suffering of those outside their high gates – and even from the suffering within their family – the Queen's own children and Sister and the life partners they have chosen, for example the saga of Charles and Diana.

SCREEN: It's the End of the World main screen

We've now come to the final week of our message series titled, It's the End of the World as We Know It . . . and I feel fine. Today is the final week of our Church year. The Season of Advent and the new Church Year begin next Sunday. And so our celebration today calls us to focus on a different crown – the Crown of Jesus Christ the King: A monarch who shows us what true service looks like. In today's Gospel Jesus gives us his teaching on the Final Judgment. Each week in this series, we've heard Gospel readings that have been very challenging. In fact, we heard Fr. Mike say last week that these passages probably aren't anyone's favorites. Week One was the parable of the wedding feast, where five foolish virgins were locked out because they were unprepared to meet the bridegroom. Last week's parable of the talents ended with one servant cast out into the

darkness for burying his talent in the ground. Both give examples of sad and very unhappy people like in The Crown. And now we hear a very detailed description of the Final Judgment displaying humanity being separated into two groups, sheep and goats. The sheep go off to eternal life, the goats to eternal damnation.

We heard something similar in the reading from the Prophet Ezekiel, who writes that the Lord seeks out the lost sheep, binding up the injured, healing the sick. And it ended with this warning:

SCREEN: 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.

Jesus must have had this prophecy in mind when he described the Last Judgment, telling us how God will decide who is rewarded and who is punished. Exactly what does a person have to do to enter eternal life?

Jesus gets very specific: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit the prisoner.

If we do these things, we show we are members of his flock. We will live with Christ forever in heaven. If we don't do these things, eternal

punishment awaits us. That certainly goes against our image of a loving God of mercy who doesn't ever want to be separated from any of us.

The point of this passage, as throughout the Gospels, is not to judge others, but that God is the only Judge and God will judge us at the end of time. How often do we judge others by their actions but give ourselves a pass?

My day, like I imagine your day, IS a series of Choices, sometimes made unconsciously. I choose how to what is of the highest priority; what I want to do or not do; how I will respond to someone asking me to do something with them or for them; how much time – and effort – to put into each task I'm supposed to accomplish, or event at which I'm supposed to participate. And, of course, what to eat, when to rest, pray and exercise, and when to do something fun or enriching. **And at the end of my day, I can go to sleep either feeling good and peaceful, or dissatisfied and disappointed with the way things went.**

What exactly did I accomplish? What was the high point, the best moment? Did I say or do something that was inappropriate or mean spirited? Did I hurt someone's feelings? Did I neglect to help someone I could have

helped? Did I think of myself first or did I consider the needs or feelings of someone else? In other words, to use the distinctions that Jesus makes in this Gospel, was I mostly with the SHEEP or with the GOATS today? The bottom line is: Am I at peace with myself, God and others at the end of the day? Can I sleep the sleep of the just? Can I be at peace?

SCREEN: “Let all be at peace!” is a phrase from the Rule of St. Benedict that envisions a situation in which all members of the community are free of anxiety, receiving what they need.

We are assured that the King we celebrate this morning is a King who rules with gentleness and compassion, with freedom and love and a King who wishes that every single man, woman and child be at peace.

Therefore the focus is on how we see Christ in one another and how treat each other accordingly. It is an honor and a privilege **and a JOY** to be able to help others, to serve as Jesus himself did.

SCREEN: For as Pope Francis reminded us last month: We each face a CHOICE between what counts and what doesn't, between continuing to ignore the suffering of the poorest and mistreating our common home, Earth, **OR transforming our way of acting.**” October 10, 2020.

So then what does condemnation mean? What is hell and who is actually there now? Ask the average person and they will say, Adolf Hitler,

mass murderers, the worst dictators or serial killers you can image. We aren't comfortable with a loving God and eternal damnation. In fact the Church says that hell exists, but we can't specifically say who is there. God is the one who makes that judgment. All we know for sure is what Jesus said: you didn't feed the hungry, you didn't welcome the stranger, you didn't clothe the naked. And so we are left with simply this: We must imitate Jesus, our Good Shepherd, by loving and caring for one another.

God promises there will be no surprises come Judgment Day. God told us 2000 years ago all we need to know to get to heaven. We have a really clear road map with a direct route. There will be no shortcuts, but also no roadblocks or detours. So here's the map God gave us: earth here, heaven there. You here, Jesus there. Here's the HOW, the route: Love by serving; profess Jesus as Lord; love and serve God and one another with everything you've got. It's that second part – serving others – where most of us fall short.

SCREEN: In the face of life's challenges are you making the lives of others better?

So let me ask this: in the face of life's challenges are you making the lives of others better? This past year, we've all faced enormous challenges: disruptions to our lives, the lives of our family members, worries about our health, our finances, our safety, and the future of our nation. And in the face of all that, did your words and actions make the lives of others easier or harder? Were you more understanding, helpful, forgiving, joyful, encouraging? Did you see people who were struggling, whether they were family members, neighbors, or strangers and did you put yourself at their service?

If you can answer "yes", then rest easy knowing you will be counted among the sheep of Christ's flock. And if you know you didn't, it's never too late. There will be opportunities every day to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the stranger. This week's bulletin presents you with some and next week we will offer you more ways to serve.

SCREEN: The Crown

One of the most memorable scenes in the Netflix series The Crown happened in Season One - it was the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, when she was anointed with Chrism by the Archbishop of Canterbury. At that

moment, she swore an oath of service to the United Kingdom, an oath she tries very hard to live by throughout her entire reign.

As this Church year comes to an end,

let us renew our allegiance to Christ and his Kingdom.

As members of God's family,

let us serve God by putting our faith into practice

every day of the rest of our lives.