

*Christ the King- A
Deacon Pat Hall*

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28; Matthew 25:31-46

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God.

First read the Sunday readings at:

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/112011.cfm>.

“Heaven or Hell?”

Well now that **I’ve** got your attention, let’s see if God can get ours.

Our readings mix a couple different images. Ezekiel provides us the image of God as our shepherd: rescuing us, tending to us, feeding us, resting us and healing us.

We hear this echoed in the most famous of psalms, the 23rd where with the Lord, our shepherd, we shall want for nothing, where we will possess goodness and kindness.

Then in St. Paul’s letter, we are presented with the second coming of Christ who comes to destroy every authority and power, even death itself, so that we could be presented to our Father.

And then Matthew presents us with a vision of Judgment Day, when the enthroned Son of Man comes in glory to act as a shepherd in sorting out those who will go off to eternal punishment or to eternal life.

Today we celebrate the *Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ the King* and yet our readings describe him also as a shepherd. This can be a challenge to us because we don’t have a king... and most of us have never seen a shepherd. If we think power and prestige are what makes a king, then we have a problem with a shepherd who is at the bottom of the pecking order. Most of our lives we struggle to find a safe place on that pecking order, a place of security. A couple of months ago I told you about a study that said that we all think we will be secure if we have only 20% more... 20% more of what? Our search for security is an endless pursuit of what cannot be obtained by our own efforts.

We bring our anxiety even to our religion.

Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

That’s a pretty sobering statement. We certainly want to avoid that. So let’s do the plan: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the ill and visit the imprisoned. If I do that, will I be able to avoid the eternal fire? I hope you noticed something **bent** about my thinking. It was all about **me** doing something, achieving something and getting something. Sounds like 21st

Century America to me. Sounds like I left God out of all of this. Sounds like I'm the one grabbing at heaven. I'll do what I need to do on this side so I can have what I want on that side.

Notice that when the Son of Man addressed the righteous he told the righteous that they fed him, welcomed him and cared for him. They were confused: "Like, when did we do that?" They were told when "you did for the least ... of mine." The righteous didn't do so to "get to heaven", so that they could be the sheep placed at God's right hand. They did so because, having God in their hearts, they naturally embraced God in the need of others.

Origen, one of our Church Fathers said:

*For the kingdom of God is within us and in our hearts. And so it is beyond doubt that whoever prays for the coming of the kingdom of God within himself is praying rightly, praying for the kingdom to dawn in him, bear fruit and reach perfection...The Father is present **in him...** and **in his soul** Christ reigns alongside the Father.*

If I were P.T. Barnum and promised the attraction of seeing God in the central big top, people would pay as much as they would to be a space tourist in a Russian capsule. And yet God says, "Here I am. You can find me in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the poor and the prisoner."

Ask anyone you know who has visited our sister parish in El Salvador. Why do they go there? Because they are good? Because it goes into their "goodness bank account"? That they can achieve heaven at the end? They go because they find the face of God. In finding the face of God, they need not wait for the end times to glory in the sweet taste of Heaven.

And of course you don't need to get a passport to find God. God makes himself available to you in the poor and needy who share their lives with you in this community. Ask anyone who volunteers at Ministry with Community serving meals to the homeless. It is not about them feeling like they are "good". It is more of a humble, privileged feeling of allowing God to love them and those they serve.

And so when you come to church and bring a canned good for our Loaves and Fishes box, is it because you are being good? How about pausing before you drop the can in the box. Imagine the family who will receive it. Imagine God loving them. Imagine you loving them and then realize God has been loving you the whole time. That is a taste of heaven. That is an experience you can take with you into eternity.

God is saying more than to do the right thing. God is asking you to be open eyed to receive him, to receive the family inheritance that he has prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Yes, God wants you in the eternity of heaven, but God wants you today. Today is your Judgment Day.

It's not so much about who gets into heaven, it's more like Origen intimated: it's about who let's heaven into their hearts.

I would like to give you a minute to silently pray. Today is your Judgment Day. How can you open your heart to God? Allow yourself to feel the desperation that you cannot do this on your own. Allow yourself the consolation that in just minutes, God will make himself truly present to you as you come to his table. He will provide you with the grace that is needed to open our stubborn human hearts.

God has given us a beautiful thought to take into our silent prayer:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

(minute of silence)

× In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen