

Christ the King Sunday is actually a relatively new festival, when you consider the over 2,000-year history of the church. Instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI, it was more or less created in response to a world that was increasingly being pulled into and divided by nationalism, secularism, and consumerism, a world that was also still reeling from the effects of the Spanish Flu pandemic, so, you know, all things that we couldn't possibly relate to in any way, at all today, here and now. There were all these things that were vying for people's devotion and playing on the many insecurities people were feeling at the time. So Christ the King Sunday became a calling back of sorts for people to remember whose we are and who we are called to be. And while we recognize this day each year at the end of our liturgical calendar, perhaps this year, more so than most, it bears a particularly timely reminder.

I like to think of Christ the King Sunday as the summation of all the things we have seen and heard over the past year. One year ago, we began this journey through Matthew's Gospel and if you recall, it began with a very clear pronouncement from Jesus, that the Kingdom of God has arrived. But human nature does not allow us to be so easily swayed to believe things simply because someone says they are true. We want to see it. So in reality, we celebrate Christ the King at the end of the year because hopefully after hearing story after story and teaching after teaching and parable after parable, we will finally see that Christ has not been lying at all. That Christ declared the Kingdom of God has arrived and then backed it up when he fed the hungry, healed the sick, taught radical things about love of neighbor, and showed us what this Kingdom really is about. Christ announces the Kingdom and then shows us the ways of the Kingdom in word and deed.

Which is why it's so interesting that neither the sheep nor the goats realize what they've been doing. They don't realize that they have encountered Christ in their action or inaction. Perhaps, we can understand the goats' lack of awareness in the parable, but how is it that the sheep don't know when they've met Christ? Why do they not recognize Christ in the one's they have served?

It really should come as no surprise that one of the greatest joys of life has and is and will be, being a father. Of course, we are expecting baby number two in the spring, but for the moment, being a father for me means being a father to my daughter Blakely. I figure I better get her into a sermon before she's old enough to be embarrassed by it. And any of you who are parents or who have been parental figures to someone can hopefully understand when I say that what fills my cup, as a dad, is watching this beautiful little girl grow and learn and explore the world

around us. It's incredible to take on this view of another life and yet it is also one where I feel an immense amount of responsibility. What will she learn? How will she grow? Who will show her a world where grace and compassion and mercy are central to who we are as people? Who will teach her about love and caring for others? Who will she become? And like my parents and their parents before them, I feel the weight of that responsibility. And I cherish it, knowing that the ways of the Kingdom might grow a little more.

Someone taught the sheep about compassion. Someone taught the sheep about caring for the least of our brothers and sisters. Someone taught the sheep empathy. Someone taught the sheep what love looks like. Someone taught the sheep the ways of the Kingdom of God. And someone instilled the Kingdom values so consistently and constantly that they have become engrained in the lives of the sheep so much that they couldn't possibly imagine doing anything different. They may not know why and they may not know who, but feeding and tending to the hungry and thirsty, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick, and visiting the imprisoned are just the way things are done as sheep in the Kingdom. And way back along the line of history and ancestry, someone learned this way from Jesus, who not only told us that a Kingdom like this was possible, but showed us how real it is, when we open ourselves to an encounter with God through our neighbors.

Now, this really isn't a parable about all the things you have to do in order to become a sheep. It's not simply orders on how we are to live, but opportunities to glimpse the reality of the Kingdom in our lives. It's not about doing all the right things in order to be accepted into the Kingdom. You already are. Christ has already become incarnate, lived, died, and rose again, precisely so that you would be justified. The grace of God is already in effect. But what the parable is trying to help us see is that we are not only accepted into the Kingdom of God, but are now called into the way of the Kingdom of God. That if we truly trust Jesus at his word, if the Kingdom of God is truly present here and now, and if Jesus has truly shown us what it looks like to live in this Kingdom, then we cannot live any other way.

The sheep don't recognize Jesus because it never dawned on them that there would be anyone who was not Christ to them. Such is the way of the Kingdom, where Christ has taken all to himself and made them his own. Such is the way of the Kingdom, where all people have become brother and sister to us. Such is the way of the Kingdom, where every mouth is fed, every person is clothed in righteousness and grace, every person is cared for, and every person is a welcomed and essential part of the community of faith. Such is the way of the Kingdom, where Christ the King reigns, no

matter what this old and tired world throws at us. A blessed Christ the King Sunday to you, my brothers and sisters. Be sheep and do sheep things. For in doing so, the Kingdom way becomes the way. Amen.