CHRIST THE KING 2026

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (Christ the King)

Lectionary Notes for Sunday, November 22, 2026

BACKGROUND

On the last Sunday of each liturgical year, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, or Christ the King.

Pope Pius XI instituted this feast in 1925 with his encyclical *Quas primas* ("In the first") to respond to growing secularism and hostility against the Church. Today reminds us that while governments and ideologies come and go, Christ reigns as King forever.

During the early twentieth century, in Mexico, Russia, and in many parts of Europe, atheistic regimes threatened not just the Catholic Church and its faithful, but civilization itself. Pope Pius XI's encyclical gave Catholics hope and—while governments around them crumbled—the assurance that Christ the King shall reign forever. Pope Pius XI said that Christ "reign[s] 'in the hearts of men,' both by reason of the keenness of his intellect and the extent of his knowledge, and also because he is very Truth, and it is from him that truth must be obediently received by all mankind" (*Quas primas*, 7).

Quas primas continues to ring true. The Holy Father speaks directly to the problem of what he referred to as "anti-clericalism," by which he meant the attitude of those who were seeking to extirpate Christian influence from political life. We see a version of this same attitude today, for example, when it is suggested that belief in Catholic teachings renders a person unfit for a judicial appointment. And in recent years, aggressive secularist campaigns have sought to marginalize the Church and other religious institutions.

When our nation is beset by civil unrest, racial tension, and political division, we do well to turn to Our Lord, who reigns over every people and nation.



READINGS

First Reading — Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

Responsorial Psalm — Psalm 23:1-2, 2-3, 5-6

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Gospel — Matthew 25:31-46

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Reading 1: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

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.

- Ezekiel speaks to the pain and the hope of so many members of the Church in America today. His message is directed to a people that has been taken into exile. Judah had been carried away into Babylon when Ezekiel, who was both a priest and a prophet, presented these words. The sheep, that is, the faithful remnant, would hear these words and recognize that the shepherd had not abandoned them.

- As our country faces growing polarization, racial injustice, and anti-immigrant sentiment, Catholics might reflect on the many among us who have experienced exile from their homelands. How many continue to experience this country as a place of exile rather than a home or refuge? As we celebrate Christ the King, how are we called to help build a community in which the stranger is welcomed, and every person's dignity is respected?

- Ezekiel also speaks a good word to a suffering Church. Many whose faith has been shaken by the clergy abuse scandals can find hope in those words, "I myself will look after and tend my sheep." For many Christians, it is this hope in the Lord himself - the Lord who seeks the lost, shepherds rightly, and judges between the sheep and the goats – that keeps them holding on to the Church.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23:1-2, 2-3, 5-6

R. (1) 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.
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

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

Reading 2: 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Brothers and sisters:
Christ have been raised from the dead,
the first fruits 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 first fruits;
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.

- The theme of the End appears in the first sentence of this passage, when St. Paul refers to Christ's resurrection as first fruits. The Apostle teaches that all who have received the kingdom, who belong to Christ, will rise from the dead. Christ's resurrection reveals what awaits all who are found in Christ. This promise of everlasting life impels Christians to remain close to Christ.

- Christ's kingship relativizes all earthly powers. We rightly want to be good citizens, and we should always pay legitimate authorities the respect that is their due. At the same time, we must recognize that every authority is subject to Christ.

- When Christian language or symbols are used to advance national, racial, ethnic, or partisan supremacy, they obscure rather than proclaim the kingship of Christ.

Alleluia: Mark 11:9, 10

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come!
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

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.'

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.'
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 eternal life."

- Just as in the Ezekiel passage, this text speaks of the shepherd who separates his own, the sheep, from the goats. Perhaps easily overlooked is that by echoing the prophet, St. Matthew identifies the Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth, as the Lord of Israel. By pairing this text with the passage from Ezekiel, the Church shows how Jesus of Nazareth identifies himself as the God who revealed himself to Moses and the prophets.

- As Shepherd, the Lord cares for and watches over his people. The shepherd and the sheep know one another. The people of God show that they know Jesus by practicing the works of mercy. In a homily on this passage, Pope Francis says: “The one who accomplishes these works shows that he has welcomed Christ’s sovereignty, because he has opened his heart to God’s charity. In the twilight of life, we will be judged on our love for, closeness to and tenderness towards our brothers and sisters. Upon this will depend our entry into, or exclusion from, the kingdom of God: our belonging to the one side or the other. Through his victory, Jesus has opened to us his kingdom. But it is for us to enter into it, beginning with our life now – his kingdom begins now – by being close in concrete ways to our brothers and sisters who ask for bread, clothing, acceptance, solidarity, catechesis.”

- By being close to sisters and brothers who are suffering, we draw close to Jesus. People in our country are hurting right now. Our friends, family members, and our immigrant neighbors are among those suffering. The economic downturn means that many people may be wondering how they will pay their bills or where their next meal will come from. We Catholics, as individuals and as parishes, can look for opportunities to minister to the needs of people who are hurting and, by doing so, we will be acknowledging the kingship of Christ.

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- It is not only as individuals that we can act for the good of others. Caring for the poor requires both individual and collective action. The state has a responsibility for protecting vulnerable people, and Christians should work toward the ordering of our common life to the good of all. Furthermore, the Church as a society in her own right is responsible for serving the vulnerable.

- The Church has institutionalized many of these works of mercy, setting up schools, refugee resettlement agencies, adoption and foster care services, hospitals, and more. The Church should play a vital role in our world's recovery from the pandemic. The Catholic Church is one of the great providers of charitable and social services in this country. Of course, as Pope Francis often reminded us, the Church is not an NGO.2 The Church's public works are animated by the Spirit of Christ.

- Religious freedom means, at a minimum, that the Church has the space to continue to carry out these works. When governments restrict the ability of the Church to serve in areas like health care, child welfare services, immigration, and education, they violate the rights of the Church. As faithful citizens, Catholics must both promote religious freedom and use that freedom to serve others.

- On the Solemnity of Christ the King, Pope Leo XIV prayed that every young person might discover the beauty and joy of dedicating themselves to Christ's "Kingdom of love, justice and peace."3 As we reflect on this feast's readings, we are called to embody this reign of love by standing in prayerful solidarity with young people and all people facing violence and distress worldwide, ensuring our faith becomes a tangible refuge of hope and safety.

- In honoring Christ, the King, who shared in the Jewish heritage and whose cross bore the title "King of the Jews," we are called to reject antisemitism and every misuse of Christian language or symbols to justify contempt, exclusion, or hatred. Guided by Pope Leo XIV's prayer for a "Kingdom of love, justice, and peace,"4 our faith demands that we safeguard the dignity of our Jewish brothers and sisters, ensuring our communities stand as sanctuaries of safety, solidarity, and mutual respect.

- The same is true for our Muslim brothers and sisters who continue to endure anti-Muslim sentiments. Because Jesus Christ is King of the Universe, our concern for our neighbor and desire for a just society extends beyond our own community. The Church regards Muslims with esteem, recognizing their worship of the one God and their commitment to prayer. She urges Catholics to set aside past hostilities and work together for mutual understanding, peace, and social justice.

- On the Solemnity of Christ the King, Pope Leo XIV promulgated his Apostolic Letter *In Unitate Fidei*, reminding us that Christ's kingdom is built not on worldly power or division, but on true communion and the "gentle power" of God's love. Echoing his call for an "unarmed and disarming peace," our reflection on Christ's kingship urges us to disarm our words and choices, rejecting civic polarization and military mindsets to become active "artisans of reconciliation" in a divided world.

Sample General Intercessions

Celebrant: Aware that only in Christ do we find true freedom, let us present our prayers, interceding for all in need, as we respond, Lord, hear our prayer.

Deacon/Reader:

1. For Pope Leo, our Bishop N..., and all the ministers of the Church, that their preaching and example may encourage the faithful to stand firm in their beliefs as witnesses of the Gospel, we pray to the Lord…
2. For our President, Governor, legislators, judges, and all in service to the common good, that through the gift of heavenly wisdom, they may never fail in their duty to uphold religious freedom and conscience protection for all, we pray to the Lord…
3. For those discerning God's call in their lives: may they be open to listen to the Lord's voice and find support to say 'yes' to his invitation to serve freely in love, we pray to the Lord…
4. For the many ministries of the Church that reveal God's power and love to the world, especially our educational institutions, health care facilities, community centers, and charitable services, especially the Catholic Campaign for Human Development: may they enjoy full protection to fulfill their mission, we pray to the Lord…
5. For the sick who long for healing, for the dying, and for those called to heal and comfort the sick and suffering: may they be free to follow their faith, while fulfilling their professional duties, we pray to the Lord…
6. For all of us who gather in prayer, trusting in God's grace to save: may we, through the gifts of the Spirit, have the wisdom to know God's will and find courage to stand up in witness to his love, we pray to the Lord…
7. For those who have died and for all who grieve and mourn their passing from this life: may the promise of resurrection for the just give hope to all, we pray to the Lord…

Celebrant: Almighty eternal God, in whom we find true freedom and lasting peace, look with favor, we pray, on our needs and, seeing the faith that inspires us to pray to you, grant what we truly need, especially the freedom to serve you in love. Through Christ our Lord and King. Amen.

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