CHRIST THE KING 2020 SFTC

There’s an interesting convergence in our calendars this week. In a few days our nation celebrates Thanksgiving. Today we come to the last Sunday of our church calendar, the Solemnity of Christ the King.

 Our readings provide some contrasting images of this King of ours —

 He has authority over all, and yet, He is humble and tender in His care for us, especially the most vulnerable.

 How can we properly honor and love such a King? By offering Him ours very selves in thanksgiving.

Our First Reading, from Ezekiel, describes our Lord as a tender shepherd who knows his flock intimately

 and actively seeks to heal and save us: “Thus says the Lord God: I myself will look after and tend my sheep… I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest… The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal.”

It’s hard to grasp the magnitude of this love, because we don’t always experience it in one another.

 All we can do is marvel at it, and resolve to thank Him by giving Him the very best of ourselves,

 ...the first fruits of our time, our talent, our treasure — and by imitating His love as best we can.

The Second Reading teaches us that, as humble as He is, Jesus Christ is also the Lord of all,

 having authority over individuals and nations, both the material world and the spiritual world.

 It’s not always easy to accept someone’s authority over us, even God. But in the end it leads to freedom.

 We know this from the testimony of millions of witnesses who have gone before us.

 Paul says in another place, “No one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.”

 We need to pray for that humility to say that Jesus is Lord of my life, so He can lead us to share in His victory.

As intimately as we are called to love Him, we also need to revere Him for who He is, and accept His authority.

 It’s so easy to forget that everything we have, every breath we take, is a gift from this eternal King.

 In justice, then, we must give Him the honor and gratitude that He deserves.

What is it that He expects from us? That’s where our Gospel reading comes in.

 It begins with Christ’s own description of His Second Coming, “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.”

 Then the time of judgment will come, the separation of the sheep from the goats in the language of the parable.

 Some will be welcomed into the Kingdom of Heaven, some will have excluded themselves by their way of life.

This judgment will not depend on how influential we are in society, how high we climbed the corporate ladder,

 nor on any “worldly” achievements.

 Jesus teaches that it will be based on how we treated the least and the last...with whom He identifies so closely:

 “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least of my people, you did for me.”

 Mother Teresa referred to these “least ones” as “Jesus in His distressing disguise”...

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To make His point very clear, Jesus gives specifics — feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger,

 caring for the ill and imprisoned. These are the priorities of our Lord and King. They need to be ours as well.

This calls for a stewardship way of life: being eternally thankful for the blessings in our lives,

 and offering our time, talent and treasure for His purposes. It’s a habit formed by the choices we make each day.

It’s also a habit we form at this table. The word Eucharist meant “thanksgiving.”

 We participate in the once for all sacrifice of Christ, and we offer ourselves to the Lord and to each other.

 We are conformed more and more to that sacrificial love which is the Person of Jesus Christ, our Lord and King.

Thanksgiving is the acceptance that our life is a miracle. We experience our dependence and our gratitude,

 for we are living from mystery, because of people we did not create and powers we cannot comprehend.

Our lives are indebted to other lives and dependent upon them. Our response should be to give as we are given.

 Through this gratitude we gain the freedom to become more generous.

The more deeply we embrace this way of life, the more closely our priorities will align with His.

 This way of life helps us to imitate our Lord and King in this life, and prepares us to join Him in the next.

Our calendar and our budget are a statement of our values. What priority do we place on values that are eternal?