CELEBRATE SABBATH

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Inner peace and serenity are prerequisite for listening to God, as he speaks to us, especially in troublesome times.

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

Ezekiel was a prophet in Exile. Chapter 34 is the Prophet's critique of the performance of the leaders, the shepherds of the people. The good shepherd had the well-being of his sheep in his heart. The leaders of Ezekiel's time were not concerned about the well-being of their people. They were concerned about themselves and used their power for personal gain. Ezekiel saw the exile itself as a result of the exploitation of the innocent people by their leaders. People have suffered and were scattered and exiled from their land and were forced to wander aimlessly like "sheep without shepherd" in Babylon.

Ezekiel promised a new beginning. God will replace the unfaithful and irresponsible shepherds and God himself will lead his people. God would gather his exiled and scattered people and tenderly care for them, lead them home and reestablish them as his own people again.

Psalm 23

David had been a shepherd, and he knew how to care for the sheep and what it cost him. He became shepherd of his people. He had to figure out how he should care for them. He knew the sheep well and now he must come to know his people, their ways, their needs and their concerns. This problem gave him a new awareness of what God, the true shepherd, is like in his relationship to his people.

God knows his people just as they are in all their need, in their stubbornness and stupidity as well as in their value and worth. Like a good shepherd…God reaches out, searches out to the lost and keeps them safe. Like a shepherd…..God provides food, drink, safety, light in darkness, comfort and strength in "dark valley moments". This Psalm proclaims the enduring, steadfast, loyal, unconquerable love of God, the good shepherd, who will never let us slip out of his hands!

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose,
Beside restful waters he leads me; He refreshes my soul.

I Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Paul assured his Corinthian readers that Christ had conquered sin and death by his death and resurrection and that he is now Shepherd King. Unlike other (earthly) kings who gloat in their victories and enjoy the loot, the victory of Jesus is shared by all. Paul says, "we too shall share in Christ's victory over death and sin".

Paul goes on to say that Christ is the "first-fruits" of what will happen to all his followers. For the Jews, the "first-fruits" were a sign of the harvest to come. The resurrection of Jesus was the sign of the resurrection of all believers, which was yet to come. Just as the new barley could not be used until the first fruits have been duly offered, so the new harvest of life could not come until Christ had been raised from the dead.

The Jews believed that no man existed by himself and for himself. Every individual existed in a web of connections…. "no man is an island" as Thomas Merton says. Each person lives in connection with other persons around him, before him and after him. With this understanding of man, the Jews had come to believe that all had sinned in Adam. When Adam sinned all sinned and all were under the penalty of death. Paul says, in Christ all are conquered from the power of sin and death. The effects of sin and death are overcome in the death and resurrection of Christ. Christ has conquered death and sin and liberated us and fulfilled his Father's will for us.

Mathew 25:31-46

In this excerpt, Mathew invites us into a vivid imaginative courtroom scene where judgment of those who are worthy to be welcomed into eternal life is taking place. The highlight of the scene is the criteria for the judgment of worthiness: **loving kindness.** Loving persons do loving acts. Kind people do kind deeds. It is help in simple, ordinary things, response to daily needs of ordinary people: giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, comforting the sick – things that anyone can do, things that do not require training in skills or a degree or diploma from a university. It is not performance of miracles or preaching of great sermons or donations of large sums of money or holding higher positions in society or any recognition offered to a person by the world, but in simple acts of loving kindness which has become part of the very nature, character of a person.

Acts of kindness are done, not for a reward, not even thinking that it is done for the Lord, but it has become part of a person's nature. It is help which is uncalculating. In the parable, those who helped did not know that they were helping Christ and gaining merit for eternal life. And those who failed to help said, "if we had known it was you, we would have helped". Acts of loving kindness flow from loving hearts, from loving people without expecting praise, reward and merits….it is the nature, the character of loving people to do loving things in response to the simple, everyday needs of ordinary people.

The judgment is about what you have become and not what you have done or not done. You have become a new creation. You have become a noble person. You have become sons of God. You have become sensitive to those around you. You have become especially sensitive to the marginal people in the community. You have reached out in kindness because you just couldn't do otherwise.

Today is the feast of Christ the King - we proclaim Christ as our king and celebrate his kingship over us, rejoice in our royal and noble character and pledge our loyalty to Christ our king and master and Lord. Noble people must live noble lives. Kingdom people must live kingdom values. The values of kingdom are lived out in response to the simple, daily need of ordinary people.

Take a moment and pray: May your kingdom come! May your will be done! May your purpose be fulfilled! May I bring my will into harmony with your will, O Lord!

Saint of the Day, November 22 - Saint Cecilia and 11 other saints are remembered this day.

St. Cecilia was a young Roman Christian who made a vow of virginity (around second century). Her parents, however, insisted that she marry Valerian, a pagan. On her wedding night, she courageously told her new husband about her vow and that an angel was with her to protect her. Valerian was skeptical and told her he wanted proof of the angel. Cecilia sent him to the future Pope Urban. Valerian found Pope Urban and explained why Cecilia sent him. Pope Urban baptized Valerian, and when he returned to Cecilia, he saw an angel sitting beside her. So strong was Valerian's conversion that his brother Tibertius also wanted baptism. The brothers then began to serve Christ by burying Christians who were martyred.

Cecilia spent her time preaching the Word of God, and she converted up to 400 persons. Eventually, the brothers were arrested and put to death for refusing to worship pagan gods. Cecilia buried them, and she, too, was soon arrested and was to die for her faith. The official ordered her death by suffocating heat in her own bathhouse. That attempt failed. Then the official ordered the executioner to decapitate her. The executioner struck Cecilia's neck three times, but he could not completely sever her head. He left her on the floor, bleeding profusely. She lived like that for three days before she died. Cecilia was declared a saint by the early Christians because of her martyrdom. Cecilia is the patron saint of musicians.

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