

## HOMILY CHRIST THE KING

November 21/22, 2020

A friend of mine was visiting the Holy Land. During their visit they were at an agricultural area where they came near a group of shepherds. There was a round pen there used to bring sheep in for the night. At the end of the day, they watched three different shepherds bring their individual flocks into the pen. They were all intermingled, with no identifying marks on them. My friend wondered how they would separate their sheep the next day, so he went back to find out in the morning. One shepherd came and said something my friend could not understand because he did not know the language, and one by one they filed out and followed him. They recognized his voice. Only his sheep followed him. The rest waited patiently in the pen.

In the first reading today, we hear that God acts as a shepherd. Christ the King of the Universe does not act like a traditional king, but king he is. He acts more like a shepherd. He rescues us when we are scattered. When we are lost, he seeks us out. When we are sick, he heals us. Sheep recognize their shepherd. They can identify the one who is taking care of them and they follow them. If only we could be that good about recognizing and following Jesus, the one who cares for us.

And acting like a shepherd is not easy. We tend to romanticize little lamb and meek and docile. Research done in New Zealand, which is famous for having more sheep than people, has shown that one-third of shepherds there have been seriously injured by attacks by sheep, often being charged from behind. Injuries to knees and broken vertebrae are common. I wonder if we are more like the sheep readily recognizing and following Jesus or more like the sheep that are charging Jesus from behind.

In the Gospel reading we hear how we will be judged at the time of our death or at the second coming of Jesus Christ whichever is sooner. We know what is going to be on the final exam. Whatever you do for others you do for Jesus Christ the King of the Universe. Whatever you do not do for others you do not do for Jesus Christ the King of the Universe. The people in the gospel reading respond that if they only knew it was Jesus, they would have helped him. Do we recognize Jesus? The easiest way to pass the final exam is to develop the ability to see Jesus Christ in everyone we meet. Can we identify Jesus Christ in others the way that sheep can identify their shepherd? The more we look for Jesus Christ in others, the better we will get at finding him.

We need to look and find the goodness in others. It is more difficult to find goodness in some people than others, but that has more to do with us than others. Who are the people that you have a hard time seeing Jesus in? Is it republicans? Is it democrats? Is it LGBTQ people? Is it people of other races? Is it people of other religions? Is it people of other nationalities? We all have biases and many of them are unconscious. One of the unconscious biases I used to have is against homeless people. I used to think that homeless people were different from everyone else. I never really thought it through consciously, but this all changed when I counseled the poor and homeless for several years at Crossroads of Michigan. When I sat with them and heard their stories, I realized that they were just like me and everyone else. Maybe something terrible happened to them. Maybe they made one bad decision. Maybe they did not have the advantages that I had. Maybe I just wanted to think they were different than me because that would mean that I would never be homeless. There, but for the grace of God, go I. As long as we hold people at a distance, we can see them as evil or not very bright or inferior to ourselves. Once we really

connect with others and find Jesus in them, we can empathize with them and be much more compassionate. We are not all the same, but we all have equal dignity as human beings. Jesus Christ dwells in everyone, so we need to look and find him. There is a needy child in each of us that is looking to be loved, looking to be accepted, looking to belong. Find Jesus Christ in others and you will know what to do for them. You will be able to pass the final exam.