

Reflections & Prayers for the Sunday next before Advent  
Christ the King

22 November 2020



Introduction

In a dramatic image, a king separates people into two camps on the basis of how they behaved towards vulnerable people: did they act with compassion towards them, or not? This parable in Matthew's Gospel had a dramatic effect on two men many years ago. One was Martin of Tours and the other was Francis of Assisi – reading this parable literally changed their lives, and the Church has benefitted from their lives ever since.

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## Readings for this Sunday

These are this week's readings which you may like to look up in your Bibles at home and read.

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Psalms 95:1-7

Ephesians 1:15-23

**Matthew 25:31-end**

### **Matthew 25: 31-end - The Judgment of the Nations**

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that 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 something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me 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 nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

### Reflection from Anne Edwards

The annual cycle of the Church’s year comes to an end this week. For many, today is remembered as “Stir Up Sunday”: named after the Collect for the day from the Book of Common Prayer which begins “Stir up we beseech Thee the hearts ...”. However, many think it relates to the day when every member of the family took a turn to stir the Christmas pudding mix, making a wish as they stirred, and Waitrose made the most of this in one of their advertising campaigns a few years ago.

But today is also Christ the King Sunday – a relatively new name for this Sunday in the Church’s Calendar – which was instituted in the Roman Catholic Church in 1925 when it was celebrated in October. From 1970 it has been kept on this Sunday, the Sunday next before Advent.

A few years ago I read an article on David Suchet: “Suchet has spent 200 hours in the past year recording the entire Bible in his sonorous voice ... It was a labour of love, indirectly linked to his own late conversion ... He was brought up a non-orthodox Jew but had been dabbling in new-age philosophies. At the end of a day’s filming, Suchet picked up the Bible in his hotel room and started to read St Paul’s Letter to the Romans. ‘I read it as a letter that had just been sent to me,’ he says. ‘By the time I got to the end I found a world view I had been looking for all my life; something I could hang onto.”

Ordinary life has unexpected twists in it, and I guess this was an unexpected twist in David Suchet’s life. What about the people we read about in the

passages from Matthew's chapter 25 – the bridesmaids who ran out of oil ... they missed the wedding; the slave who wasted his chance of increasing his talent whilst his master was away ... even that was taken away from him; and now we have the sheep and goats. All of these people and groups are unprepared and they face consequences. The people in these stories make their judgements – the bridesmaids decided there was no rush; the slave with one talent decides to do nothing, and the 'goats' decide some people aren't worth bothering about.

This reading from Matthew gives a dramatic image of a king separating people into two camps on the basis of how they behaved towards vulnerable people: did they act with compassion to them or not?

In the conversation with the king and those on the other side is that the separation has been made not on what they believed, the knowledge they had amassed, the fame they'd acquired or the fortune they had gained, but on the basis of what people did.

Indeed it is clear in the text that neither the sheep nor the goats recognised the king at all when they were either doing, or refusing to do, the acts of kindness and compassion (v.37, 39) What counts here is not the capacity to discern Jesus in the person in need, but the willingness to do the deed.

What the king in the story seems to praise is the instinctive response of human need and not the act done, or not done, on the basis of whether a person was deserving or not, nor even whether we were doing it consciously as our Christian duty. This is one of the most vivid parables Jesus ever spoke, and the lesson is crystal clear that what matters is our openness to respond compassionately to human need.

According to this parable the things Jesus picks out – giving a hungry person a meal, or thirsty person a drink, welcoming a stranger, cheering the sick, visiting the prisoner – these all are things which anyone can do.

I wonder what examples Jesus would use if he were telling these parables today, and we were his disciples sitting on the Mount of Olives with him. To

get the whole picture, we have to go back to chapter 24, beginning at verse 3. Today's parable is the final of ten different pictures Jesus paints with his words.

One of the pictures I see in this final parable is that God's loving kindness comes naturally and he expects us to respond in the same way. Not like the goats who imply that if they had seen Jesus in need then they would, of course, have "taken care" of him. And the sheep didn't think they had recognised him in those they helped either.

In his letter to the Galatians (chapter 5, verses 22 and 23) Paul tells us the fruit of the Spirit includes generosity and gentleness, as well as kindness, and according to this parable the things Jesus picks out are things anyone can do, natural, instinctive responses, quite uncalculating reactions of a loving heart. 'Loving kindness' as Bishop Philip North (Bishop of Burnley) described this way of living on Monday's Thought for the Day on Radio 4.

The 'knowledge' of God is the knowledge that God's revelation is to be found in the crucified Jesus and that this human, suffering figure is the one who rules for God, and to whom all creation is subject. When we, the Church, acknowledge him as our King, and become his body, we can have no illusions about what that body looks like. We need to pay attention to the real human beings with whom God came to identify, as we look around us for the life that created and redeemed out of love.

Let us give thanks for the signs of God at work through love by us and others today as we approach Advent and find our hearts touched with the need to respond.

### Collect for the day

Eternal Father, whose son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven that he might rule over all things as Lord and King:  
keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace, and bring the whole created order to worship at his feet; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

## Prayers

Let us pray to the Lord:

Heavenly Father we come to you,  
people who are hungry,  
people who are thirsty,  
strangers, imprisoned, exposed,  
knowing that you have come to us, too,  
in these same guises.  
In our brokenness, welcome us,  
and open up our defences as we come to you,  
O Lord of many guises. **Amen**

Lord,

Truly, we say to you that we have seen the broken and have not been  
moved to compassion.

Truly, we say to you that we have heard people mourning and have not  
given them our time.

Truly, we say to you that we have witnessed oppression and have not raised  
our voices.

Truly, we say to you that we have seen the stranger and not said a word.  
God, hiding in all strangers, all around us, we are truly sorry for what we  
have done and what we have not done.

And we ask you to deepen your welcome in us, so that we might deepen our  
welcome to those around us.

**Amen**

We pray now for this beautiful world as it slowly loses its beautiful leaves of  
autumn, and heads for winter. Help us to treat it with kindness and  
thoughtfulness, so that we are not wasteful with its natural resources.

We pray for the Church, our Archbishops, our Bishops, Alan, Michael and  
Richard, and all those who minister here at St John's, for James and Jane,  
and Julie in the Parish Office. We pray especially for Berkeley, that he may  
know your loving, healing presence during this time of anxiety and  
depression, and know that you, Jesus, are sharing his load. May that load  
grow lighter day by day, so that he eventually feels ready to return to

us. We pray too for Jill who has joined us recently and for the support she is giving us.

We pray for those who are struggling during these days of Lockdown 2, for those anxious during these shortened days as we slowly but surely head into winter – the cold, grey days – especially those needing to be confined to their homes. We pray for those who are lonely and sick, and for the families and friends of those who have died recently.

O God of kindness, send us out with more time for interruptions, and more generosity for kindness, so that we might see you in the world around us.

**Amen**

### Parish Prayers for the week ahead

#### **In the Anglican cycle of prayer:**

Sunday	The Church of Bermuda
Monday	Santiago (Chile); Santiago (Philippines)
Tuesday	Sao Paulo (Brazil); East Carolina (The Episcopal Church)
Wednesday	Sapele (Nigeria); East Kerala (South India)
Thursday	Saskatchewan (Canada); East Ruwenzori (Uganda); East Tennessee (The Episcopal Church)
Friday	Saskatoon (Canada); Eastern Himalayas (North India)
Saturday	Sebei (Uganda); Eastern Kowloon (Hong Kong); Kyushu (Japan)

#### **In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:**

Sunday	Parish of Stevenage, St Peter, Broadwater (Deanery of Stevenage)
Monday	Parish of Abbots Langley (Deanery of Watford)
Tuesday	Parish of Bushey (Deanery of Watford)
Wednesday	Parish of Bushey Heath, St Peter (Deanery of Watford)
Thursday	Parish of Langleybury, St Paul (Deanery of Watford)
Friday	Parish of Leavesden, All Saints (Deanery of Watford)
Saturday	Parish of Oxhey, All Saints (Deanery of Watford)

**For the homes and families in:**

Sunday	Gorselands, Grange Court Road
Monday	Green Lane Close, Greenway
Tuesday	Grove Avenue, Grove Road
Wednesday	Hadleigh Court, Hammondswick
Thursday	Hatching Green, Hatching Green Close
Friday	Hawsley Road, Hawthorn Close
Saturday	Heath Close, High Elms

**The Sick:**

Berkeley, Emily, Amy Smart, Claire, Jo, Sue, Christine Strohm, Hermione, Karen, Sue Holt, Enid Giles, Jo Young and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

**For the recently deceased:**

Shambu Mitra

**On their year's mind:**

Palanti Keshishian, Marjorie Curl, Stuart Chalk, Geoffrey Chalk, Elizabeth Brown

**A Month of Prayer for the Nation:**

We are being encouraged to pray daily for a specific area of national concern during this month of lockdown wherever we are, culminating in a collective moment of prayer at 6pm each evening with cathedrals and churches across the country to ring a bell at this time. Christians are encouraged to follow a simple seven-day prayer cycle for a specific area each day. These can be found at [churchofengland.org/PrayerForTheNation](http://churchofengland.org/PrayerForTheNation). If you can't go online, then I suggest that just before 6pm each evening you light a candle – a reminder that Jesus is the Light of the World – and pause bringing to God in prayer whatever you think our Nation needs most on that day. There is something special about knowing that we, Christians, are all together in praying for our Nation at the same time every day. Please make every effort to join in.



### Christmas Quiz:

Di Borthwick has produced a Christmas Quiz for many years. She has done the same again this year, and it is available through the Parish weekly e-mail. However, if you would like to have a copy you can phone Di (her home number, 763712, has a blocking device, so perhaps try her on 07866 767305) and she will send you one.

### A reminder... of this phone service:

**Daily Hope** – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.