**22nd November Collect, Reading, Reflection, and Intercessions**

**Christ the King**

**Collect**

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.

**Gospel Matthew 25.31-46**

Jesus said to his disciples: 31‘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. 32All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34Then 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; 35for 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, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” 37Then 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? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” 40And 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.” 41Then 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; 42for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I 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.” 44Then 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?” 45Then 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.” 46And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

**Reflection**

This is a really powerful reading for me. The first time I heard this read, that week I was asked to consider working at Her Majesty’s Prison and Young Offenders Institution (HMP YOI) Guys Marsh near Shaftsbury. As quick as I was to say no; when I heard this reading the following Sunday I felt rather challenged. “*35for 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, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”* It would seem that I had not rejected a job, but a calling from God.

As you know I did eventually follow this calling and spent several very happy years in prison. I really felt that this was what God wanted of me, to “visit” those in prison, although often I was more ministered to than the minister, and I met several people who hugely influenced my life and my ministry today. Much of what I learnt about love and God’s compassionate embrace comes from my time in the prison.

However not everyone gets the chance to fulfil the visiting the prisoner brief from this passage, however we can all, ALL, feed those who are hungry and thirsty. That is why the Reverse Advent calendar is so good.

In case you have not read about it yet, the plan is that as you travel through Advent instead of just eating chocolate every day, you have a large box, and put in every day one thing that is either dried or tinned food. (Or maybe sometimes something like shampoo or soap). At Christmas you will have a huge box of essentials to give to the Food Bank in Penzance. Traditionally in January the Food bank struggles to meet demand as the individuals and families face the challenges of keeping warm dry and fed in January and February when there is little work. So, gifts of these just after Christmas would be really helpful. Our Worship Leader Michelle Brown is the new Chair of the Foodbank and can give you further details.

So you can obey the call of God, to feed those who hunger and thirst, but we can also “visit the sick” too, perhaps not in person but a phone call or a letter to those who are sick and in need, but also those who are sick of the confinement of the lockdown, sick of being brave and not being able to see loved ones and friends, sick of not singing or celebrating or even just being able to Christmas shop in person. We can all help here.

What about those who thirst? Yes literally those who need a drink, but what about those who thirst for knowledge or for a chance to be allowed to make different choices. What about those who thirst for the ability to read and write, to be able to understand their finances. Or those whose thirst is for someone to share their life with this year. How might we be able to respond?

Jesus reminds the listeners in the story today, that often God is found in weird places, within those who others might dismiss. The lonely, the sick, the hungry, the thirsty, the prisoners were the places where God is found. How often do we turn away from need, perhaps being fatigued from caring, but still we turn away from those whose need is known and recognised by God.

When the lonely strangers pray for a friend,

You can be the answer to the prayer made to God.

When the sick prays for a visit,

You can be the answer to the prayer made to God.

When the naked prays for warm clothes,

You can be the answer to the prayer made to God.

When the hungry pray for food,

You can be the answer to the prayer made to God.

When the thirsty pray for respite,

You can be the answer to the prayer made to God.

When the prisoner prayers for recognition of their humanity, even then,

You can be the answer to the prayer made to God.

For it is You and I that are the means of God’s working in this world, and God calls us to give ourselves to His service, to show His love and to care with His heart.

So are you going to spend Advent as a goat or a sheep? Your choice!

**Prayers Christ the King: written by John Iles**

Heavenly Father, in the midst of this pandemic, we come to you in gratitude for the week that is past; we are humbled by the blessings that you give us; for the joys and trials that the week has brought; for the guidance and strength you have given us; for the delight we have felt in serving others and for the peace and tranquillity that we have found in this place.

Lord, hear us**. Lord, graciously hear us.**

Lord, help us to live our lives as encouraged by Pope Pius XI; may we allow Christ to reign in our minds and believe in his doctrines; reign in our wills and obey his laws; reign in our hearts to love Him above all things and reign in our bodies to serve as His instruments.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Encourage us, Lord to be a caring church throughout this pandemic; create in us the will to identify the mental strains and suffering which it brings to many people; may we emerge stronger in faith and more able to deal with the challenges which lie ahead; guide our Archbishop Justin, our Bishop Philip, Vanda our Rector and all our clergy that they may be inspired to celebrate our faith with imagination and determination.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Merciful Father, we remember today those who do not have the resources to provide for themselves; we pray for the work of the food banks who supply vital life giving support to those in need; we remember too the wave of migrant families fleeing conflict, oppression and persecution who are being tossed like flotsam around the world in their quest to find sanctuary in our country; Father, help us to look into our hearts and respond in whatever way we can to improve the plight of others

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Today is traditionally Stir up Sunday – the day on which Christmas puddings were made; Father in heaven, stir up in us the desire to be your constant disciples; rescue us from the powers of darkness; make us steadfast in your power to endure all things with patience and instil in us the image of the invisible God.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our saviour Jesus Christ.**