

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**Except for those who are really into *A Game of Thrones*, we Americans don't really buy into kings and kingdoms, so this Feast of Christ the King seems like something of a throw-back to another time and place. And perhaps it is. Today the only reigning monarch with real authority is 81 year-old King Salman of Saudi Arabia, who recently named his 32 year-old son, Mohammed bin Salman, the Crown Prince. The drama that has ensued is worthy of *A Game of Thrones*, as the young prince imprisons and fires his princely cousins, claiming they are corrupt, apparently to solidify his position by removing the opposition. Such behavior in the future king seems ominous to the longevity of this Kingdom.**

**I am old enough to remember the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II back in 1953. I was only 8 years old and barely remember that it was on the television. Therefore I was not really taken by the fact that the royal symbols were meant to explain the duties of the Queen. For instance, she was anointed with chrism and vested with liturgical garments. She also received a sword, a scepter (which is a kind of ritual spear) and a battle helmet known as St. Edward's Crown. These symbols were meant to call her to duty to protect the British Empire morally and militarily.**

**In the ancient Near East, kings drew their symbols from the work of shepherds. Early Mesopotamian kings incorporated the title "Shepherd" into their names. The Pharaohs of Egypt carried a shepherd's staff as a sign of their authority. In Israel, its great leaders Jacob, Moses, and, of course, King David, were all shepherds. Thus this image of kings responsible for sheep that appears in today's Gospel passage is deeply rooted in the history of the people of Scriptural times.**

**The first duty of the shepherd-king is to protect his people and keep them safe. As protectors, the shepherd king also has the responsibility to seek out those who were lost, as often happened to the early Israelites, carried off into slavery by neighboring tribes. It also fell to the shepherd king to tend to the individual needs of his people, as we read in today's first reading, "The injured I will bind up; the sick I will heal". The shepherd kings of Israel were also responsible for justice so that every member of the kingdom could thrive. He also had a special care for and duty toward those who suffered misfortune.**

**Today, after Ezekiel the Prophet condemned the line of David for failing to protect and safeguard, His people, sees God assume the shepherding responsibilities personally: "I myself will look after and tend my sheep". In the person of His Son, Jesus, God sends a new shepherd king, who will reign, as St. Paul tells us today, "until the end when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father..."**

**Jesus then tells us what will happen when that day of glory comes. He will separate all the people of “all the nations assembled before him” according to those who followed his example as The Good Shepherd and those who did not. He makes it as plain as day and night. Those who will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world cared for anyone in need because in caring for them, they cared for Him. Those who ignored the needs of others, who neglected to care for others, or simply confined themselves and their blessings to themselves and their own will hear, “Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”. By not doing for others, they did not do for him. “These will go off to eternal punishment”.**

**In other words, the best way to get to heaven is to be generous in giving of yourself, your time, your talents, and your treasure to help others. The road to hell is paved with self-centeredness, selfishness, and neglect of the needs of others, always putting yourself first, and being immune to the suffering and pain others are enduring.**

**The distinction Jesus makes between sheep and goats is an important part of his message. Although goats will flock to a human leader, they can also survive on their own. In fact, feral goats continue to be a widespread invasive species. Sheep, by contrast, lack the wild instincts to survive. They are, therefore, an apt symbol for our human spiritual condition. Self-sufficiency may be praiseworthy in many ways, but in matters of the spirit, no creature can go “feral” and survive.**

**God’s “sheep” know their dependence on the Shepherd. Awareness that their very being depends on the care of the Shepherd opens their hearts to the needs of others. The qualities that make someone a good “sheep” also make for a good “shepherd”.**

**I saw this in action in these past few days when more than 100 members from 11 different churches gathered in Parkesburg Baptist to rejoice in our common faith in Christ and thank God for His many blessings. Then on Thursday, another 135 people from all those same churches gathered in our Parish Center to put together meals prepared by hundreds more and delivered to more than 200 households where there were shut-ins, many of whom could count these visits and meals as their only Thanksgiving celebrations. These are good “sheep” who have become good “shepherds” modeling their lives on Christ the King.**

**As we spoke earlier of the symbols of royalty, it is important to note that Jesus, the Shepherd King, under whose reign we live and move and have our being had his feet anointed with oil and the tears of a known sinner, took as his throne the Cross of Calvary hanging between two thieves, His crown was made of thorns by his tormentors, his two-edged sword is His Word, with which he protects us from all evil and cuts out the evil thoughts, words, and deeds that can consume us. His breast-plate is his bleeding heart with which he cleanses us from our sins by engulfing us in His Love.**

**We mark the end of this liturgical year on this Feast of Christ the King with this compelling account of Jesus' example, commandments, and Spirit. It remains for us, the sheep, called to be shepherds like our King to continue the works of mercy that calm anxious hearts, restores hope to those who are lost, and brings peace to a fallen world.**

**Liturgically-speaking, the Advent season doesn't begin until next Sunday, but the Christmas rush is already here. Many rushed from the Thanksgiving meal on Thursday out to the stores or on to the internet to shop. We've already been through Black Friday and Small Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday is just a few hours away. And there's nothing wrong with it. It's all a part of the joy of the season. But today, if just for a few minutes, please just step back, take a deep breath, and consider how Christ is reigning in your life and that of your family. To make it real, what might you change in the coming weeks, leading up to Christmas, to show that Jesus is really your Shepherd King?**