Christ the King—St. Stephen
Scripture Reflection
Feast of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe
2026—A Cycle



What Do I See?

How might Michaelangelo's marble sculpture, "Pieta" (meaning "compassion," "pity") serve as an unusual, yet appropriate, image for the Feast of Christ the King?
Note: I'd like to hear your response to this question about the choice of this image to represent the kingship of Christ (algarrotto@comcast.net). Thank you for taking the time to respond.

Image source: Michelangelo Buonarroti,… St. Peter's Basilica…, Vatican City

Opening Prayer

The Good Shepherd
Lord Jesus,
you are the shepherd who left the ninety-nine...
and went after the *one*.
The *one* lost sheep is not expendable to you.
I confess that the part of me that has wandered...
does not always want to be found.
I've made excuses for my drift.
I've often called the far country "growth."
But here you come... looking for me... *again*.

Source: Chosen Portion

Scripture Readings

Ezekiel 34: 11-12, 15-17 "God, the Master, says: 'From now on, *I myself* am the shepherd.'"

Psalm 23: 1-6 "I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life."

First Corinthians 15: 20-26, 28 "Everybody dies in Adam; everybody comes alive in Christ."

Matthew 25: 31-46 The Last Judgment—"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father!'"

Introduction to the Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

World leaders, both good and evil, rise to the fore... then fade into history. Christ our King is *always* present to us, front and center. He delivers on the promise he laid out in Matthew 25: 35ff, *"I was hungry and you fed me. I was... and you...."* without end.

In 1925, Pope Pius XI instituted the Feast of Christ the King in response to growing secularism and nationalism around the world. In 1969, Pope Paul VI amended the title of this feast to Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. He also moved the date from a late October Sunday to the final Sunday of the liturgical cycle in late November. Each new liturgical year begins on the First Sunday of Advent.

Roman Catholics share this feast of Christ the King with the Lutheran Church, Anglican Communion, Methodist churches, the Moravian Church, Reformed churches, and other Christian denominations.

A Reading From the Book of Ezekiel (34: 11-12, 15-17)

"God, the Master, says, 'From now on, *I myself* am the shepherd. I'm going looking for them. As shepherds go after their flocks when they get scattered, I'm going after my sheep. I'll rescue them from all the places they've been scattered to in the storms....'

"'And I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep. I myself will make sure they get plenty of rest. I'll go after the lost; I'll collect the strays; I'll doctor the injured; I'll build up the weak ones and oversee the strong ones, so they're not exploited. And as for you, my dear flock, I'm stepping in and judging between one sheep and another, between rams and goats.'"

Personal Reflection

Around 597 BC/BCE, during the first wave of Babylonian attacks by King Nebuchadnezzar II, Ezekiel was captured alongside King Jehoiachin and the Judahite upper classes and deported to Babylon. He settled among the Jewish refugees. His prophetic ministry began there around 593 and lasted more than two decades, covering both the final siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 587 and the grief of the

exiles. He remained in exile until his death around 570 without ever returning to Jerusalem.

— *When did I catch myself in a moment of bias against people of Jewish blood and faith? Have I acknowledged my error for what it was? Or have I persisted in nurturing it?*

Responsorial: Psalm 23 (1-6)

A Davidic psalm to God, our shepherd and host (for confidence)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

God, my shepherd!
I don't need a thing.
You have bedded me down in lush meadows
and find me quiet pools to drink from.
True to your word,
you let me catch my breath
and send me in the right direction.
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Even when the way goes through
Death Valley, I'm not afraid
when you walk at my side.
Your trusty shepherd's crook
makes me feel secure.
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

You serve me a six-course dinner
right in front of my enemies.
You revive my drooping head;
my cup brims with blessing.
Your beauty and love chase after me
every day of my life.
I'm back home in the house of God
for the rest of my life.
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Personal Reflection

In this weekend's liturgy, we revisit the most widely recognized and beloved of King David's psalms. We never tire of it. It reminds us who truly guides and protects us through the course of our lives. Sadly, as David aged, he fell away from the genuine piety of his earlier life.

— *What is my favorite word, phrase, or image in Psalm 23? Why that one? How else does this psalm touch my heart?*

A Reading from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians (15: 20-26, 28)

"The truth is that Christ has been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries. There is a nice symmetry in this. Death initially came by a man, and resurrection from death came by a man. Everybody dies in Adam; everybody comes alive in Christ. But we have to wait our turn. Christ is first, then those with him at his Coming, the grand consummation when, after crushing the opposition, he hands over his kingdom to God the Father. He won't let up until the last enemy is down—and the very last enemy is death!....

"When everything and everyone is finally under God's rule, the Son will step down, taking his place with everyone else, showing that God's rule is absolutely comprehensive—a perfect ending!"

Personal Reflection

Whoever shares the faith of the apostles must accept the resurrection of Jesus as a fact. Paul laid out, in mystical terms, these consequences of faith. By faith we believe that Jesus not only lived among us, but he also lived for us and now lives within us. We too will join the Lord in Afterlife. Paul asked his converts—and us—to expand any individualistic vision of Christianity we might have. He wanted us to see that faith demands our concern for *everyone's* final destiny. Yes, *everyone*.

Again, Paul picked up the theme of the "end times." He laid out the plan as he perceived it in his, as yet, imperfect *human* understanding. Unlike the first Christian communities, we don't concern ourselves so much with the sequence of the end times and the final resurrection of the dead. Our individual concern relates more to what will become of us in that instant *following* our death.

— *How do I envision the instant immediately following my death? Can I welcome whatever might happen next? Or does that thought fill me with dread? If it does, why? What further assurance of my eternal salvation do I need to hear, if any?*

A Reading From the Gospel According to Matthew (25: 31-46)

[Jesus said] "When the Son of Man finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, he will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him, and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation.

"'And here's why. I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was homeless and you gave me a room. I was shivering and you gave me clothes. I was sick and you stopped to visit me. I was in prison and you came to me.'

"Then those *sheep* are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?'

"Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth. Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.'

"Then he will turn to the *goats*, the ones on his left, and say, 'Get out, worthless goats! You're good for nothing but the fires of hell. And why? Because I was hungry and you gave me no meal. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was homeless and you gave me no bed. I was shivering and you gave me no clothes, sick and in prison, and you never visited.'

"Then those *goats* are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn't help?'

"He will answer them, 'I'm telling the solemn truth. Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored—*that was me*. You failed to do it to me.'

"Then those *goats* will be herded to their eternal doom, but the *sheep* to their eternal reward."

Personal Reflection

This parable, combined with the Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 3-10), lays out the foundation and entirety of all Christian social and moral teaching. Together, they reveal Jesus' all-encompassing doctrine of "compassion." True compassion transcends all human boundaries of race, color, national origin and yes—also creed.

— *What do I hear Jesus saying to me personally in this gospel vision and encounter?*

For Inspirational Watching, Listening, and Reading

Watch

"The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe," a homily by John Michael Talbot (2 min.)

Listen

"Hymn to Christ the King"—composed in the 1940s by Fr. Martin B. Hellriegel in Baden, PA.

"Ave, Verum Corpus" (Hail, True Body) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, sung by the Westminster Choir, directed by James O'Donnell

Read

If you haven't yet read *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* by W. Phillip Keller, we recommend it here... again. An enlightening view of David's most famous of all psalms by a real sheep rancher. The book offers insight into both the parable and a modern shepherd's life.

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

First Sunday of Advent (beginning of the "B Cycle" of liturgical readings)

Book of the Prophet Isaiah 63: 16-17, 19, and 64: 2-7 "Since before time began no one has ever imagined, no ear heard, no eye seen, a God like you."
Psalm 80: 2-3, 15-16, 18-19 "God, come back! Smile your blessing smile. *That* will be our salvation."
I Corinthians 1: 3-9 "Every time I think of you—and I think of you often!—I thank God for your lives of free and open access to God, given by Jesus."
Mark 13: 33-37 "I say it to you, and I'm saying it to all: Stay at your post. Keep watch."

Closing Prayer

Shepherd to the Lost

Heavenly Father,
you are the Good Shepherd....
We are the sheep of your pasture.
Like the shepherd in Luke 15: 3-7...
you leave the ninety-nine to seek the one that is lost...
until you find it and bring it home.
Lord, I come before you with a heart full of gratitude...
for your boundless love and compassion.
Forgive me for the times I have wandered from your path...
choosing my own way over yours.
Remind me that even one lost sheep...
is precious in your sight...
and that I am valued beyond measure.
Amen.

Source: Bible Art

Unless otherwise indicated, the Sunday readings are from *The Message* Bible translated by Rev. Dr. Eugene H. Peterson (Catholic Edition)
Peterson's translation of the Bible is a highly interpretive paraphrase, celebrated for its readability.

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