Reflection for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

The scene set in the opening sentences of today's gospel presents Jesus, the Son of Man, as a King coming *"in his glory, and all his angels with him."* He takes his seat *"on his glorious throne"* to sit in judgement separating *"people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."* Jesus told this parable to his apostles sitting on the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem, only two or three days before his crucifixion[1]. It is the third of three parables which speak of reward for doing the right thing and rejection for failing to do so. We have listened to the first two parables over the last two Sundays. They are, of course, the parable of the ten virgins and the parable of the talents. Collectively these three parables have great significance as the final teaching of Jesus to his apostles before the Last Supper and his crucifixion.

In the days of Jesus, sheep and goats were often farmed together, pasturing alongside each other in the fields. The shepherd often had to separate them because the goats were not as hardy as the sheep and, whereas sheep could be left in the fields overnight, the goats needed to be sheltered from the cold. Jesus was able to use this scenario, so familiar to his listeners, of a shepherd presiding over a mixed flock happily co-existing in the fields before being separated at the end of the day, to provide a good image of the final judgement. *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory."*, the virtuous and the wicked who presently co-exist in this world will finally be separated to receive their reward and their condemnation. Sheep were regarded as the more valuable of the two live stocks and it seems that is why Jesus identified them with *"the righteous"*, while the goats were less valuable and so he identifies them with *"the cursed."*

What separates the sheep from the goats is their behaviour towards *"the hungry…the thirsty…the stranger…the naked…the sick and prisoners"* whom Jesus describes as *"the least of these my brothers and sisters."* The sheep are invited *"to inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* because they have reached out to people in their needs whereas neglect and indifference towards those in need is enough to condemn the goats *"to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."*

Only a matter of days before his death Jesus sits on the Mount of Olives preparing his apostles for his imminent departure. He is about to entrust his Church and mission to them. His final three parables, which have been put before us over the last three Sundays, speak about reward and rejection. All three parables, and especially today's in which Jesus sits on *"his glorious throne"* of judgement, underline the need for his followers to be found worthy of the trust he places them.

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[1] Matt 24:3