Homily Notes

world youth sunday ENGLAND&WALES 20th - 22nd Nov

Homily Thoughts for World Youth Sunday, Feast of Christ the King.

Liturgy of the Word Reflections

We are celebrating the feast of Christ the Shepherd King.

Our first reading is taken from chapter 34 of the prophet Ezekiel. The whole chapter is devoted to the theme of God as shepherd.

The first part of the chapter deals with false or bad shepherds who have failed to look after their sheep. They haven't fed their sheep, or sought to heal the sick and injured, or searched for those who have stayed. They have ruled them with force and harshness.

So God decides to look after the flock himself. He will keep them in view, will rescue the strays, find them good pasture, look for the lost, bring back the strays, care for the wounded and weak.

God will be the true shepherd.

God will also judge between the sheep and the goats. This verse forms a link with the later Gospel parable.

At one point God promises to establish his servant David as shepherd, which opens up the role of Jesus as shepherd.

The responsorial psalm continues the shepherd theme. It's probably our best known and best loved psalm.

This psalm was written centuries before Ezekiel and forms the basis of subsequent shepherd references.

It's also very personal: "*my* shepherd". This is worth pondering: there is a uniqueness to our relationship with God and God's love and care for each of us.

The different verses highlight aspects of God's shepherding care for us. He provides good pastures where we can eat and find rest. He provides water to quench our thirst, and revives our drooping spirits, supports us when we are 'down'.

He is the guide for our life's journey, keeping us safe in dark and difficult places. He provides a banquet for us. The banquet is a frequent scriptural image.

And his goodness and kindness shall follow us all the days of our life, so that in the end we shall dwell permanently in God's house (see John 14:1-4).

There is much here for us to ponder in prayer.

The shepherd theme continues in the Gospel parable, as Jesus, the glorified Son of Man, takes up the role as judge (linking with Ezekiel).

It is important to remember that this is a parable; we are dealing with figurative language not with a factual description of a future event.

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The theme of Jesus as Shepherd is not developed only in John's Gospel, especially chapter 10. It is also a theme in Matthew. When the Magi reach Jerusalem looking for the newborn king, Herod seeks the advice of the religious leaders. They quote the prophet, showing that he will be born in Bethlehem , and will be "a ruler who is to be shepherd of my people Israel." Jesus is the Shepherd King.

There are a number of episodes in the Gospel of Matthew in which it is clear that Jesus sees himself as the shepherd.

In the parable it seems that the sheep and goats have already been separated. The Shepherd King confirms the situation, welcoming the good into the Kingdom and banishing the evil.

What is particularly significant is the list of criteria which he chooses. The sheep have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick and those in prison.

And Jesus identifies with these different groups. "Whatever you did to the least of these brothers and siters of mine, you did to me."

So Jesus, our Shepherd King, outlines how we are to live as his disciples (his sheep or subjects). He stresses the importance of how we treat people in any kind of need. He continues to identify himself with them.

The second reading doesn't fit the shepherd king theme, but stresses the transformation which has occurred through the resurrection of Jesus, a transformation in which we shall come to share, a transformation through which he has become King.

Scripture reflections provided by Fr Michael Winstanley SDB

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World Youth Sunday Reflections

Today we celebrate World Youth Sunday, alongside the Feast of Christ the King. It is an opportunity to celebrate the young people in our parishes and give thanks for the gifts, enthusiasm, faith and hope they bring to the Church and society.

The readings present us with the image of Christ as the Shepherd King: a God who seeks the lost, cares for the wounded, strengthens the weak and leads his people. In the Gospel, Jesus reminds us that our faith is demonstrated through how we treat others, particularly those most in need.

Christ the shepherd King: a God who seeks us

Scriptural anchor: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17 and Psalm 23.

Our first reading presents God as the Good Shepherd, who seeks the lost, brings back those who have strayed, cares for the injured and strengthens the weak. The responsorial psalm reminds us: "The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want."

For our young people: God knows each of you personally. He knows your hopes, fears, questions and struggles. You do not have to be perfect or have everything figured out before coming to him. God meets you where you are and walks alongside you.

Pope Leo reminds us that even before we begin to seek Christ, he is already seeking us. Our courage comes from knowing that we are never alone.

For the parish community: We are called to reflect the heart of the Good Shepherd. Do we notice when young people are missing? Do we reach out to those who may feel disconnected or overlooked? Are we creating a community where every young person feels welcomed, valued and listened to?

Reflection prompt:

- For young people: Where might you need to allow God to guide you in your life?
- For the parish: How can we become a more welcoming and attentive community for our young people?

The victory of love: seeing Christ in others

Scriptural anchor: Matthew 25:31-46.

The Gospel reminds us that Christ identifies himself with those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and imprisoned. "Whatever you did to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did to me."

Pope Leo develops this message by reminding us that true victory is not about overcoming others, but about giving ourselves to them. Jesus shows us that greatness is found in self giving love.

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For our young people: You have so much to offer through the simple ways you live your lives. Kindness towards a friend, standing up for someone being treated unfairly, including someone who feels excluded or helping those in need are all ways of living your faith. You do not need to wait until you are older to make a difference.

For the parish community: We should recognise and encourage the generosity and compassion of our young people. We must give them opportunities to put their faith into action through charitable work, service and involvement in parish life.

Reflection prompt:

- For young people: Where do you see people in need around you, and what small act of kindness could you offer?
- For the parish: How are we helping young people understand that faith is something we live through our actions?

A Church that welcomes, listens and empowers

Connection with Pope Leo XIV's message and the celebration of World Youth Sunday.

Pope Leo reminds us that we do not have to do everything alone. There is courage in accepting help, recognising our limitations and allowing others to walk alongside us.

He also challenges us to open our hearts to Christ and to one another, allowing his love to transform our everyday lives.

For our young people: You have a place in the Church today. Your ideas, questions, gifts and perspectives matter. You are not simply the future of the Church; you are an important part of its life and mission now. Do not be afraid to get involved, share your faith and offer your talents.

For the parish community: World Youth Sunday should not simply be a day when we celebrate young people before returning to normal. It is an opportunity to consider how we welcome, listen to and involve them throughout the year.

We should provide meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in parish life, take on responsibilities, share their ideas and develop their relationship with Christ. A welcoming Church is one where young people know they belong.

Practical applications:

- Encourage young people to become involved in parish ministries and activities.
- Create opportunities for young people to share their experiences, ideas and hopes.
- Build relationships between generations so that young and older members of the parish can learn from one another.
- Consider one practical way to make young people feel more welcomed and involved throughout the year.

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Conclusion and invitation

On this World Youth Sunday, let us give thanks for the young people in our parishes and all that they bring to our communities. We celebrate their gifts, enthusiasm, questions, hopes and desire to make a difference.

The readings remind us that Christ is our Shepherd King. He knows us, seeks us, cares for us and leads us. Through his Resurrection, he has overcome the world and invites us to share in his victory.

To our young people: Do not be afraid to be yourselves, trust in God and use the gifts he has given you. You are loved, valued and have an important place in the Church. You do not have to wait until tomorrow to make a difference. Christ is calling you to live your faith today.

To the parish community: Let us make a renewed commitment to our young people. Let us listen to them, walk alongside them, encourage them and give them opportunities to flourish.

Our invitation this week:

- Young people: Take one step towards becoming more involved in your faith or parish community. Offer an act of kindness or reach out to someone who may be lonely.
- Parishioners: Take time to speak with a young person, listen to their experiences, encourage their gifts and pray for them.
- As a parish: Consider one practical way to ensure young people feel welcomed, valued and involved.

May we all have the courage to follow Christ, our Shepherd King, recognise him in those around us and share his love with the world.

“Take courage! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Amen.