

God of our days and years,  
we set this time apart for you.  
Form us in the likeness of Christ  
so that our lives may glorify you.

**Amen.**

What God has prepared for those who love him,  
he has revealed to us through the Spirit;  
for the Spirit searches everything.  
Therefore let us in penitence open our hearts to the Lord,  
who has prepared good things for those who love him.

**Penitence:** God of mercy,  
we acknowledge that we are all sinners.  
We turn from the wrong that we have thought and said and done,  
and are mindful of all that we have failed to do.  
For the sake of Jesus who died for us,  
forgive us for all that is past,  
and help us to live each day  
in the light of Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**Absolution** May God our Father forgive us our sins,  
and bring us to the fellowship of his table with his saints for ever. **Amen.**

**Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24** [God the True Shepherd]

Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

This is the word of the Lord;

**Thanks be to God.**

**Psalms 100**

**Matthew 25:31-46** [The Judgement of the Nations]

'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. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then 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; for 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, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then 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? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And 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.” Then 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; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I 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.” Then 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?” Then 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.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

This is the gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

### **Sermon**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Where did this festival come from? It didn't figure in our calendar when I was younger!

The historical reality is that Pope Pius XI instituted the feast of Christ the King in 1925 to remind Christians that their allegiance was to their spiritual ruler in heaven as opposed to earthly supremacy, which was claimed by [Benito Mussolini](#). So it's really an attempt to counter fascism and secularism from that time.

“'Christ,' Pius XI said, 'has dominion over all creatures, a dominion not seized by violence nor usurped, but his by essence and by nature.'” The feast is marked in the Revised Common Lectionary, and Anglican Churches have followed this practice since 1969.

Firstly, exactly who is this Son of Man, a title which is sprinkled throughout the Gospels? Well, our text today gives us a very clear answer to that. It transfers the authority of God to the coming Son of Man, since glory, angels, and throne are all exclusive accoutrements of God. As Matthew puts it, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.”

I want to spend a minute on some of the words of today's very rich readings.

“The Father of Glory” is how St. Paul describes God the Father in today's Epistle. The ancient Greek doxology which we know as the “Gloria in Excelsis” is an attempt to express our awe, our worship, the immensity of that entity that we call God. We use superlative words like splendour, beauty, magnificence, radiance and rapture to try to describe God's greatness and transcendence. We humans crave the glorious! One of the most important ways in which the Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New, speaks of God, however, is that he rules as king – that he reigns as king.

The early writings in the OT from the time of the two kingdoms depict God in royal terms. Exodus proclaims that “The Lord will reign for ever and ever”. The idea of God's eternal reign as king in the future is repeated numerous times, in the Psalms, and right through to Jeremiah and Micah. God's sovereignty extends to the elements of nature; he is Creator-King. God's rule is in the heavens, but his throne in OT times was depicted as being the ark of the covenant. The NT, too, speaks often of Jesus as king as, with its roots in the OT Davidic kingship and in the OT messianic idea. Jesus is called “King of the Jews” and “King of Israel”. Matthew's favoured term “kingdom of heaven” or more accurately “king of the heavens” means the same as “kingdom of God”. It's just a characteristic Jewish substitution of “heaven” to avoid using the divine name. It is the kingdom of the One who is in the heavens.

But of course this Son of Man, this king of the heavens, doesn't act like your typical middle-eastern king. He is often described oddly as the servant king – a term which I am sure would have been derided, then and even today by some.

But God is also described today as the true Shepherd. He is the one who separates the sheep from the goats. The observant among you will have noticed that it comes from our passage in Ezekiel: “Thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy.”

But once we get past these questions about how we should describe God, we are left with the text. Matthew needs no help from the likes of me to help us understand this passage. It is an extremely clear, radical and uncompromising message. The so-called righteous people condemn themselves with their own words: "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?" And we have the answer at the end of the passage: "Just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me". There's no answer to that, is there? The message is clear as crystal.

Each one of us in our baptism was given a wealth of love, and an intimate experience of the presence of God. We renew that gift at each Eucharist, as we receive Jesus into our lives and join with the hosts of heaven in worship and thanksgiving. We have been given the grace to show the faith within us to others. That may be in giving instruction or providing shelter and I hope by telling and showing the love of Jesus at one and the same time.

The real lesson of this parable today is an invitation for you and me to seek God. Not in the beauty of the sunsets or the birth of babies. Not to find God in the obvious places such as the beauty of mountains and sea and to therefore conclude that there is a God. God is to be found hiding behind the faces and places of suffering people. "I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink." This social justice tradition is venerable and very Jewish – the prophet Micah; "He has told you, O mortal, what is good: And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

It was Mark Twain who said it first. "It is not those parts of the Bible that I do not understand that bother me. It is the parts of the Bible that I *do* understand that bother me the most."

Having started by acknowledging that politics was the *raison d'être* of this Feast Day, let me finish by reflecting on the inaugural address of our President, Michael.

What struck me, more forcefully than I expected, was the parallel sentiment between his words and today's gospel passage. His thesis was pure social justice Christianity. He challenged us to open a new chapter based on a different version of our Irishness ... that will require a transition in our political thinking, our view of the public world, our institutions, and our consciousness. He stressed the importance of the ethical connection between politics, economy, development and society. He used terms such as "humility"; "a different set of values"; "a society which is profoundly ethical and inclusive"; "that we should draw on our shared strengths". His central theme was that our strength lies in our common weal – our social solidarity. It struck me how different his terminology was from that of our driven, acquisitive society.

Amen.

### **The Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

**Amen.**

### **Intercessions, beginning with the Collect of Christ the King**

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 I live and reign with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Grant to the Church light to know the will of God and grace to perform it. Make all Christian people true followers of Christ in their lives day by day.

Fill the world with the spirit of compassion, that the powerful may use their power to help the weak. Break through the barriers that divide people and nations, and draw all together for the common good.

Give us deeper compassion, open our eyes to see the presence of Christ in all people. Grant us insight to know where we can give help in the needs of friends and neighbours and in all our community, and grace to offer it.

We pray for all who suffer, for the poor and hungry, for those severely affected by COVID-19, whether as carers or patients. Bless all at the front line of this pandemic who seek to relieve suffering. Keep them healthy, patient and constant in their work.

We give thanks for those to whom the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven have been opened and who now rejoice with the faithful. Keep us firm in faith until we share with them in that eternal Kingdom.

**Amen.**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever, Amen.

### **Dismissal:**

Strengthen for service, Lord,  
the hands that holy things have taken;  
may the ears that have heard your word be deaf to clamour and dispute;  
may the tongues which have sung your praise be free from deceit;  
may the eyes which have seen the tokens of your love shine with the light of hope;  
and may the bodies which have been fed with your body  
be refreshed with the fulness of your life;

and the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you and remain with you always.

**Amen.**