Pastoral Reflection, November 22, 2026

The earliest crucifix I remember, on the living room wall of my childhood home, had a corpus in which Jesus wore a priestly vestment and a crown. When we celebrate Christ the King, we celebrate Christ the high priest who reigns from a cross as a suffering servant and a good shepherd. As we hear today from chapter 34 of the prophet Ezekiel: "I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest, says the Lord GOD. The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal."

Today's reading from chapter 15 of the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians celebrates our suffering servant Christ who is sovereign even over death:

Christ has been raised from the dead,
the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep…
For just as in Adam all die,
so too in Christ shall all be brought to life:
Christ the firstfruits;
then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; . . .
He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.
The last enemy to be destroyed is death.
When everything is subjected to him,
then the Son himself will also be subjected
to the one who subjected everything to him,
so that God may be all in all.

In 1925, Pope Pius XI established the feast of Christ the King as a response to an increase of secularism, atheistic regimes, and the relegation of religion to private life. Nearly a hundred years later, in 2012, the Catholic bishops of the United States asked preachers on Christ the King to preach about religious liberty, which they understood to mean more than the freedom to assemble for worship. They wrote: "[The Catholic faith] obliges us to work together with fellow citizens for the common good of all who live in this land. That is the vision of our founding fathers and our Constitution, which guarantees citizens of all religious faiths the right to contribute to our common life together."

As we Christians work together with our fellow citizens to serve the common good, we are reminded by today's gospel passage from chapter 25 of Matthew that Christ reigns from the cross as a suffering servant and shepherd of "the least of these:"

For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,
a stranger and you welcomed me,

naked and you clothed me,
ill and you cared for me,
in prison and you visited me.

Amen, I say to you, whatever you did
for one of the least of mine, you did for me.

~Gregory Heille, OP