Homily Christ the King (A) 2026

I started preparing this homily, fittingly, on the feast of St Margaret, Queen of Scotland (11th Century). Despite her royal status Margaret, a Hungarian princess by birth, was a true 'shepherdess' of her flock, consistently 'going out' to the poorest and neediest of her kingdom and humbly addressing their needs. I am so proud of our queen that every time I visit Lourdes, I guide my group to the far bridge over the River Gave where stands a dedicated statue to Scotland's patroness saint, Margaret Humble Queen of Scotland.

On the feast of 'Christ the King' the model of Christ's Kingship is set out in The Liturgy of The Word. In the First Reading from Ezekiel 34, God proclaims, 'I will search for my sheep and will seek them out. I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered. I will seek the lost, I will bring back the stray, I will bind up the injured and I will strengthen the weak.' The model of kingship is humbly 'going out', 'searching', 'rescuing', 'supporting the struggling', 'treating the injured' 'strengthening the weak' and being with the dying'. The shepherd would even break The Law of The Sabbath for the care of his flock. This is a template for Christian discipleship, but particularly for our 'pastors', our bishops and priests.

A very good friend of mine, who is a great priest, spent 2 years on a sheep farm, believe it or not it was the property of Farmer Giles. He was astonished at the love this shepherd had for his sheep. Available 24/7 three hundred and sixty-five days of the year this shepherd in wind, rain, sleet or snow 'went out' to 'seek', find', 'feed', 'rescue', 'deliver', 'bring back', 'nurse', 'comfort' and in a word 'LOVE' his flock.

The Responsorial Psalm reinforces this selfless 'shepherding', "The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose. Near restful waters he leads me; he revives my soul. He guides me along the right path. You have prepared a banquet for me in the sight of my foes. My head you have anointed with oil; my cup is overflowing. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. In the LORD's own house shall I dwell for ever and ever." The 'shepherd' is thus required to give the sheep 'repose', 'revive souls', 'keep them on the tight path', 'protect them from harm', 'feed, soothe and give in abundance' until we, the flock, reach 'the LORD'S own house'.

Good shepherds should not fear when they reach the end of their days when Jesus will deliver '…the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. When all things are subjected to him…' (Second Reading 2 Cor. 35) They will then hear The Shepherd King welcome them, as in today's Gospel Reading, "Come, you who 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 drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, when I was sick and dying and you visited me, when I was in prison and you came to me." You have indeed been a 'good shepherd' Jesus' words directed at the 'hired man' are not so positive…

I believe every candidate for the priesthood should spend a compulsory period with a 'good shepherd' and his flock before Ordination. Much would be learned about the essence of priestly PASTORAL ministry.

A shepherd in first-century Israel was generally regarded as a working-class labourer.

Low social standing: Shepherds were not normally wealthy, influential or educated members of society. **Limited security:** Many were employed by landowners or wealthy families and had little control over their economic circumstances.**A difficult reputation:** Because shepherds spent long periods away from settled communities, some were regarded with suspicion. **Physical hardship:** Their work involved exposure to heat, cold, storms, rough terrain and the constant danger of wild animals and thieves.

It is important, however, not to assume that every shepherd was despised or regarded as dishonest. Shepherding was a respected and necessary occupation in Jewish agricultural life. The negative social reputation sometimes associated with shepherds should not be exaggerated or treated as universal.

2. The daily life of a shepherd

A shepherd's life was governed by the needs of the flock rather than by a conventional working day. **Early morning** - The shepherd would gather the sheep, check for injuries or illness and predators. **At night** - Depending on the season and circumstances, sheep might be brought into a sheepfold or kept in an open grazing area. Shepherds might remain with the flock, taking turns keeping watch.

This helps us appreciate Luke 2:8: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."

These men were not simply taking an evening stroll. They were carrying out their ordinary occupational responsibilities, remaining awake to protect animals entrusted to their care.

3. The shepherd's clothing and possessions

A typical shepherd would have owned relatively few possessions. His clothing might have included: A simple woollen or linen tunic. An outer cloak to protect him against cold nights. Leather sandals. A leather belt. A head covering for protection from the sun. His essential equipment included:

Staff for Guidance and protection of the flock

Rod Defence against predators

Sling Driving away dangerous animals and guiding the flock like a modern sheep dog does

Water container Carrying drinking water

Shepherd's bag Carrying food and personal necessities

Famous OT Shepherds

Moses: Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro when God appeared to him in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1).

David: David was a shepherd boy when Samuel anointed him to become king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:11–13).

Amos: Amos described himself as a herdsman and cultivator of sycamore figs before God called him to prophesy (Amos 7:14–15).

Most importantly, shepherding became one of the Bible's great descriptions of spiritual leadership.

Consider these passages:

Psalm 23:1 – "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."

Psalm 78:70–72 – David was taken from tending sheep to shepherd God's people.

Isaiah 40:11 – God gathers the lambs in His arms and gently leads those that are with young.

Ezekiel 34:11–16 – God promises to seek out His scattered sheep and care for them.

Thus, the shepherd could be socially humble but spiritually significant.

8. Why did God announce Christ's birth to shepherds?

This brings us to one of the most remarkable aspects of the Christmas narrative.

Luke 2:8–20 tells us that the first announcement of the birth of Jesus was made to shepherds watching their flocks at night.

Consider the contrast:

The world's expectations God's announcement

Kings and rulers NOT Ordinary shepherds

Wealth and privilege NOT Humble circumstances

Palaces NOT A manger

Political influence NOT Working men in the fields

Human recognition NOT Heavenly revelation

They went to Bethlehem, found Mary, Joseph and the baby lying in a manger, and subsequently told others what they had seen and heard (Luke 2:15–18).

Third, there is a connection with David.

The angel specifically mentioned the city of David (Luke 2:11). David himself had been a shepherd before becoming kingThe announcement of the birth of David's greater Son to shepherds in David's own town is a striking biblical connection.

Fourth, the announcement points towards Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Jesus later declared: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." (John 10:1) The shepherds who heard the announcement of His birth were representatives of an occupation that would become one of the most important pictures of Christ's ministry.