

**CE—Sunday After All  
Saints' Day-B  
November 4, 2012**

**TODAY'S SCRIPTURE**

**Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9;  
Psalm 24; Revelation 21:1-6a;  
John 11:32-44**

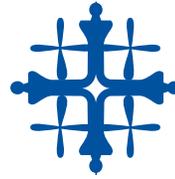
<sup>32</sup>When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." <sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup>He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup>Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup>So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup>But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" <sup>38</sup>Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup>Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." <sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup>When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup>The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

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# Synthesis CE

A Lectionary Study Guide following the Revised Common Lectionary

**INTERPRETATION**

## For All the Saints

"For all the saints, who from their labors rest ... " On this celebration of All Saints' Day, we give thanks for the example of those who have gone before—as we look to God's future that brings triumph over death.

The Wisdom of Solomon was composed in Alexandria by an anonymous Hellenistic Jew in the latter part of the first century B. C. Written in the tradition of King Solomon, who was renowned for his wisdom, the book provided strength and consolation to Diaspora Jews living in the midst of the Greco-Roman culture of Egypt.

The verses for today focus on the hope of eternal life with the assurance that "the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them" (3:1). Even though it would seem that they have suffered and died, they are now at peace where "their hope is full of immortality" (v. 4). Any suffering they have endured is like a refiner's fire in which they have been purified. Unlike the wicked, they are assured of God's favor, presence, grace, and mercy (v. 9).

The promise of the Wisdom of Solomon is manifested in the Gospel account of the raising of Lazarus. Found only in John (11:1-44), this event took place as Jesus made his way to Jerusalem. As the last of the seven miracles or signs recorded by John, this foreshadows the Resurrection and sets the stage for the plot to crucify Jesus.

The setting of the story is the village of Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem, at the home of Jesus' friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Jesus had received word from Mary and Martha asking him to come, as their brother Lazarus was very ill. Although Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters, he delayed setting out for Bethany for two days. A return to Jerusalem entailed danger for Jesus; thus the disciples had tried to dissuade him from going. By the time Jesus finally arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead for four days.

When Martha came to meet Jesus, she declared that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had come sooner. Jesus assured her that her brother would rise again, and his rising would be more than the general resurrection at the end of time. Then Jesus declared himself to be the Resurrection and the Life for all who would have faith in him (11:25). Martha affirmed that she had such faith.

As the verses appointed for today begin, a tearful Mary kneels at the feet of Jesus and declares, as Martha had previously, that if Jesus had been with them, their brother would not have died. "Greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved" (v. 33), Jesus weeps as he approaches the tomb. This emotional response on the part of Jesus is unusual in the Gospel of John and has several possible explanations. Perhaps it is heartfelt human grief over the death of his friend—or his anger at the power of sin and death that held the world captive until overcome by Jesus' death and Resurrection. Those present comment on his love for Lazarus, but question why Jesus did not

prevent the death of his friend—since he was able to open the eyes of the man born blind (Jn. 9:13-41).

When Jesus asks to have the stone at the entrance to the tomb removed, Martha protests that decomposition of the body would have already begun. According to contemporary Jewish belief, the soul of the dead remained in the vicinity of the body for three days and then departed. By mentioning again that Lazarus had been in the cave for four days, the Gospel writer emphasizes that Lazarus is truly dead. The practical Martha is reassured by Jesus that—even though Lazarus is dead—if she believes, she will see “the glory of God” (v. 40).

As the stone is removed, Jesus voices a prayer of thanksgiving. Having received direction and confirmation from God that he is to raise Lazarus, his audible prayer is not one of petition but one of praise that *God is already acting* to bring life from death. Following this prayer, Jesus commands, “Lazarus, come out!” (v. 43).

Lazarus does indeed come out. He is fully alive and apparently completely restored, with no lingering decay of death. Jesus calls for his friends to finish the healing he has initiated; they are to unbind Lazarus to let him resume life among his friends and family in Bethany (v. 44).

Here we see Jesus as the one who brings new life. He is indeed the Resurrection and the Life as he claimed. The unbinding of Lazarus is symbolic of the liberation of resurrection, as Lazarus is free to live into a new future. However, this is more than the resuscitation of a corpse—first and foremost this event reveals the glory of God for which Jesus came (1:14; 11:4, 40). It is also a foreshadowing of the Resurrection of Jesus himself that will bring the gift of eternal life to the world.

The vision of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1—22:5) in the Book of Revelation gives a description of life in the coming

age when “death will be no more” (21:4). Originally written to bring hope to those who suffered in a time of persecution, these promises of God’s future continue to bring comfort and strength.

Here God’s work of reconciliation is reflected in the renewal of all creation as foretold by the Prophet Isaiah (65:17; 66:22). Just as Lazarus was unbound by the healing love of Jesus, all of creation will finally be set free by God’s action. In this vision, heaven and earth are completely transformed: “a new heaven and a new earth” (21:1). The Holy City of Jerusalem has been restored and is like a bride adorned for her groom.

In this new age, the home of God will be among mortals. God will dwell with the saved and will be their consolation, wiping every tear from their eyes (v. 4a). Suffering, evil, and death will be vanquished, causing God to declare, “See, I am making all things new” (v. 5). Furthermore, we can be assured that these words are a present as well as a future reality—true from the beginning to the end, for “*It is done!*” (v. 6).

Thus, on this Sunday After All Saints’ Day, we celebrate with the Psalmist, who in Psalm 24 proclaims the victory and sovereignty of the Lord as the “King of glory.”

William Long has written of the passage in Revelation: “John finishes with the majestic words of verse 6: ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. ...’ There will finally be established the truth which has been peeking out at us since the dawn of human history—that God, indeed, stands before, in, and after the creation of the worlds. Pain certainly has the upper hand today, but it shall not always be so. This does not make us flag in our zeal to attack the pain today; indeed, it renews our strength in the midst of the fight. We now know the end, and we can have courage to re-enter the maelstrom. Let that be your charge and courage today.”



*Jesus declared:  
“I am the res-  
urrection and  
the life.”*

## IMPLICATIONS

1. As you read the Gospel Lesson, imagine the scene as Jesus approaches the mourners gathered with Martha and Mary. Notice the responses of Jesus as the events unfold. Why do you think Jesus was disturbed and “deeply moved” (Jn. 11:33) as he approached the tomb, although he knew that he would raise Lazarus? What do we learn about Jesus himself as well as his ministry from this passage?

2. Notice the words and actions of Mary and Martha. Although they have faith in the healing power of Jesus, what do they still not understand (v. 40)?

3. Before he calls Lazarus out of the tomb, Jesus looks upward and prays. As you read his prayer in verses 41-42, why do you think Jesus prayed aloud at this time? What do you think the effect of his words might have been on those who heard them?

4. As Lazarus emerges from the tomb, Jesus tells the people in the crowd to “Unbind him, and let him go” (v. 44).

What are the things that “bind” your own life? How can faith in Jesus bring liberation from such constraints?

5. What do you imagine it might have been like for Lazarus after Jesus called him out of the tomb?

6. This dramatic event is the last of the signs in the Gospel of John and foreshadows the death and Resurrection of Jesus himself. What is the impact of this story for us today?

7. The readings for today offer assurance of God’s presence and the promise of eternal life. As you read the words of William Long in the Interpretation section, how are you filled with hope for the present as well as the future?

8. On this Sunday After All Saints’ Day we celebrate the lives of those who have been sources of inspiration. Who are some of the people in your own life who have served as models of faith?



**CE—Proper 27-B**  
**November 11, 2012**

**TODAY'S SCRIPTURE**

**Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17; Psalm 127; Hebrews 9:24-28;**

**Mark 12:38-44**

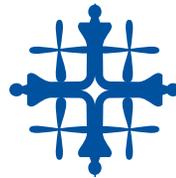
*<sup>38</sup>Teaching in the temple, Jesus said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, <sup>39</sup>and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! <sup>40</sup>They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” <sup>41</sup>He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. <sup>42</sup>A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. <sup>43</sup>Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. <sup>44</sup>For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”*

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## INTERPRETATION

### Giving All

“*She gave all she had ...*” In the Gospel passage, Jesus calls attention to the sacrificial giving of an unnamed widow to warn against the arrogant behavior of the religious and social elite, as exemplified by the scribes.

The events in today’s passage are set within the context of Jesus’ final days in Jerusalem before the Passion. After his entry into Jerusalem (Mk. 11:1-11) and the cleansing of the temple (11:15-18), Jesus went out of the city. Upon his return, he once again went to the temple, where he had several encounters with the chief priests, scribes, and elders who continued to question his authority (Mk. 12:1-44). Here we find the conclusion of Jesus’ teachings in the temple.

In the first part of the reading (Mk. 12:38-40), Jesus warns his disciples to beware of the scribes who call attention to themselves with their elaborate dress and privileged position in public places. The scribes were a learned group who were hired to draw up official legal documents. Because they were trained in matters of both law and Scripture, they were respected as authorities in theological as well as legal matters. They were allied with the chief priests and elders as opponents of Jesus (2:16; 3:22; 9:14).

Here Jesus reproaches them for their excessive behavior at the expense of compassion and justice. Because they were well versed in the law, they were able to use that knowledge to exploit others—“they devour widows’ houses” (v. 40a). Moreover, their public display of piety with long prayers did not manifest itself in justice and concerns for the less fortunate. Because their prayers were mainly concerned with being seen by others, “they will receive the greater condemnation” (v. 40b).

The scribes, in their quest for prominence and privilege, as well as their complicity in an oppressive social system, represented the exact opposite of the *ideal servanthood* Jesus had proclaimed throughout his ministry (9:34; 10:31, 43).

The focus now shifts to a poor widow (cf Lk. 21:1-4), who symbolizes those exploited by the privileged classes, as represented by the scribes. Jewish law demanded care for sojourners, orphans, and widows (Dt. 10:17-19; 24:17-22; 27:19). Widows were among the most vulnerable members of society. Without inheritance rights, they were dependent upon other family members or charity for survival. Thus in many Old Testament texts God is depicted as the one who defends widows and orphans, with neglect and oppression of widows incurring Divine wrath (Dt. 14:29; Jer. 49:11; Ps. 68:5; 146:9).

Jesus sat and watched the crowd as individuals passed by and put money into the treasury. In Jesus’ time, temples often functioned as banks; but in this particular situation, it is assumed that people were making contributions for the upkeep of the temple itself.

The noise made as coins were thrown into the large metal receptacles would call

attention to the amount being donated in a public display, similar to that of the attention-seeking scribes. “Many rich people put in large sums” (v. 41). In contrast, a poor widow put in two copper pennies—the smallest coin in circulation.

Jesus, addressing his disciples, called attention to the action of the widow. “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury” (v. 43). Her contribution, like that of the widow of Zarephath in the Old Testament (1 Ki. 17:8-16), was truly sacrificial. Out of her poverty, she gave everything she had and put her very existence at risk. In contrast, what the rich gave cost them virtually nothing, for they had much more. The widow exemplifies simplicity and generosity in contrast to the self-serving privilege of the scribes.

Here Jesus points to the exploitation and oppression of the poor that ignores God’s call for justice and care for those who are most vulnerable. Immediately following this incident, Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple (13:1-3) in which the whole repressive religious system will be destroyed.

Jesus emphasizes the fact that the widow “put in everything she had” (v. 44). Jesus, as God’s Messiah, would also give of himself totally. Thus the letter to the Hebrews shows Jesus as the one who made of himself, once and for all, the perfect sacrifice. He has gone to dwell in heaven, and now offers limitless intercessions on our behalf. Since he is our High Priest, no other offering will ever be needed to do away with sin. This stands in contrast to the priests who enter the Holy Place year after year and repeatedly present the blood of animals for atonement.

As mortals, we are given one time to die, and “after that the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). However, Christ who bore our sins will appear again. But this second coming of Christ will not be to deal with sin, but rather to save those who are eagerly awaiting him at the end of all time. Thus, rejoicing in Jesus’ once-for-all deliverance, it is with joy that we await his com-

ing again in glory to make our salvation complete.

In the Old Testament reading, a Moabite woman named Ruth has left her homeland to follow her Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi, back to Judah. Both women were widows, and as the verses appointed for today begin, Naomi wishes to insure Ruth’s future by helping her find a husband.

Jewish law decreed that grain on the edges of a field was to be left for “the poor and the alien” to harvest (Lev. 19:9-10). Thus Ruth gathered grain in the fields of a man named Boaz, who was a kinsman of Naomi’s deceased husband.

According to the precepts of levirate marriage (Dt. 25:5-10), the brother of a man who dies without a son must marry his brother’s widow. The first son born to this

marriage is to carry on the name of the deceased brother. Thus, following Naomi’s instruction, Ruth presents herself before Boaz, who acts as her next-of-kin and makes Ruth his wife.

In due time, Ruth bears a son, who thus blesses the old age of Naomi. This child, named Obed, was the grandfather of King David and is listed in the genealogies in Matthew 1:5 and Luke 3:32. Ruth is also named in Matthew’s account.

Sue Armentrout has written: “We must include something about the story from the Old Testament about two wily widows. That makes three widows who share the lectionary this week. Ruth and Naomi are regarded as symbols of fidelity to each other and to God. Ruth is a foreigner, but embraces the God of Israel. The two women resort to some ‘feminine wiles’ to take control of their lives. And though Naomi’s advice to Ruth may not be to our liking, and her subjugation on the threshing room floor is definitely not what we’d expect, we can take away from the story a good ‘lesson’ in spite of the cultural oddities.”

Yet this beautiful story shows how God works in surprising ways through the lives of often unlikely people. Ruth was not an Israelite; yet she was an ancestor of Jesus. She is a model of fidelity and love, and her devotion to Naomi reminds us of God’s dedication to the people of Israel. #

*We are  
challenged to be  
faithful stewards  
of all that we  
have.*

## IMPLICATIONS

1. In the opening verses of the Gospel passage, what are the specific charges that Jesus makes against the scribes? Why will they receive “greater condemnation”?

2. How do you see the attitudes and actions of the scribes replicated in our contemporary culture?

3. In Mark 12:41, we read that Jesus sat and watched the crowd as people put their offerings into the treasury. What do you imagine might have been going through his mind at this time? Why do you think he specifically called the disciples’ attention to the widow?

4. Put yourself in the place of the widow in this story. What do you think might have compelled her to give everything she had? How are we challenged by her actions here?

5. What is the contrast that Jesus makes between the offering of the widow as opposed to the contributions of the rich people? How are those who have wealth and influence called to use their resources and advantages? What role does sacrificial giving have in our life of faith?

6. What are the attitudes toward wealth and poverty that are expressed in today’s passages? How are we called as disciples of Jesus to be faithful stewards of what we have been given?

7. In Scripture, widows represent those who are most vulnerable in society. Who are the most vulnerable in our world today, and what is our responsibility toward them? As you read the words of Sue Armentrout in the Interpretation section, what do we learn from the widows in today’s readings about faithful living? #

**CE—Proper 28-B**  
**November 18, 2012**

**TODAY'S SCRIPTURE**

**1 Samuel 1:4-20; 1 Samuel  
2:1-10; Hebrews 10:11-14  
(15-18), 19-25;**

**Mark 13:1-8**

*<sup>1</sup>As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" <sup>2</sup>Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down." <sup>3</sup>When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, <sup>4</sup>"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" <sup>5</sup>Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. <sup>6</sup>Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. <sup>7</sup>When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. <sup>8</sup>For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs."*

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**INTERPRETATION**

## God's Final Victory

Today's readings call attention to perseverance in faith as well as God's care for the faithful, both in the present time and in the age to come.

The Gospel passage is taken from Mark's "Little Apocalypse" (Mk. 13:1-37; cf Mt. 24-25; Lk. 21:5-36). Apocalyptic literature is concerned with the end of human history, characterized by cosmic upheavals and final judgment. The writing itself is highly symbolic and is meant to provide encouragement to the faithful during times of trial. Although apocalyptic texts focus on the future, they also reflect current issues and situations. The genre is represented by the Book of Daniel in the Hebrew Scriptures and by the Book of Revelation in the Christian tradition. Further apocalyptic writings include 1 and 2 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 and 3 Baruch, all found in the Apocrypha.

The apocalyptic writers were successors to the prophets who repeatedly warned of God's judgment and the coming Day of the Lord—when there would be a new creation, with justice for those God would preserve from the great final cataclysm.

Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming that "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near ..." (Mk. 1:15). Now, as his earthly ministry is coming to a close, Jesus addresses his disciples for the final time before his Passion. As is characteristic of apocalyptic testaments, these words reflect the concerns of the Markan community at the time, while suggesting mysteries concerning the future.

Mark's apocalyptic discourse begins with Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple (13:1-8); followed by warnings of persecution (vv. 9-13); and a description of the cosmic destruction (vv. 14-23) that will precede the coming of the Son of Man (vv. 24-27). The discourse concludes with Jesus' parables and sayings to his followers about the necessity for vigilance (vv. 28-37).

These words are addressed to Peter, James, John, and Andrew as they sit on the Mount of Olives overlooking the temple. The location is significant because, according to tradition, the Mount of Olives was to be the site of God's final victory (Zech. 14:4). After Jesus predicted the temple's destruction, the disciples asked when this would occur and what would be the signs. Thus the discourse is in response to this question.

Jesus had been teaching in the temple, and as he was leaving, one of the disciples expressed amazement at the size of the temple buildings. According to Mark's chronology, this is the first and only time that Jesus and the disciples had been in Jerusalem. Thus they are impressed with the size and grandeur of the monumental buildings of the temple complex.

Jesus responded by declaring that the temple will be completely destroyed—not a stone will remain standing (cf Mt. 26:61; Jn. 2:19; Acts 6:14). Here Jesus reflects the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, who also warned of the destruction of

the temple (cf Jer. 26:18; Mic. 3:12). This prophecy was used against Jesus when he appeared before Caiaphas (Mk. 14:57-58) and again at his crucifixion (Mk. 15:29).

The disciples then ask when this destruction will come to pass and what signs will precede these calamitous events. Jesus warns them to be cautious and to guard against false messiahs who will lead them astray. Here Mark is attempting to downplay misplaced end-time conjectures by emphasizing the need for careful discernment, since many would come claiming to be Jesus or to teach in his name.

Jesus went on to say that they should not be alarmed by talk of “wars and rumors of wars” (v. 7). Such predictions of wars among nations, earthquakes, and famine were common in the Old Testament prophetic writings (Is. 19:2; 13:13; 14:30) and also appear in Christian apocalyptic writings. All of this is seen as part of the Divine plan that will ultimately lead to the full revelation of God’s Kingdom. Just as birth pains indicate that a child is about to be born, so do these events signal the coming of the Kingdom. Thus faithful believers need not fear, for God’s promises will be fulfilled when the Risen Christ reigns in glory.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews also offers encouragement to the fledgling Christian community as they “see the Day approaching” (10:25). Christ has “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins” (v. 12), and sits at the right hand of God. Now Christ the Priest, who is at the same time the victim, goes from the cross to the sanctuary of heaven itself, where he makes intercession for God’s people.

The flesh that he has offered becomes for them a new and living way into God’s presence. With the assurance of forgiveness, accepted faith, and pure hearts and bodies, God’s people are to “provoke one another to love and good deeds” (v. 24) as they await the coming Day of the Lord.

In the Old Testament reading, hope for the future is realized as a barren woman’s prayers for the gift of a child are answered. Childlessness in ancient Israel was regarded as a sign of God’s displeasure. Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, was not able to conceive a child; and although her husband assured Hannah of his love for her, the taunting of Elkanah’s other wife, Peninnah, was unbearable.

Hannah prayed so fervently at the temple at Shiloh that

the priest, Eli, accused her of being drunk. She vowed that if the Lord would grant her a male child, she would dedicate the boy to God as a nazirite—one consecrated to the Lord’s service who did not partake of intoxicating drinks or cut his hair.

Eli recognized her sincerity and told her that her petition would be granted. When the child was born she named him Samuel, which means “I have asked him of the Lord” (v. 20). After Samuel was weaned she took him to the temple, where he remained in the service of Eli until God called him to be the nation’s prophet. He would guide all Israel through many difficult times.

The prayer of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 is today’s response to the Old Testament Lesson. Hannah’s joy at the birth of her son and reflections on God’s favor toward the lowly are similar to the words of Mary in the Magnificat (Lk. 1:46-55). But what began as a song of praise and thanksgiving for the gift of a child ends with a strong affirmation of the power of God. The Lord will “*judge the ends of the earth ... give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed*” (v. 10).

The birth of Samuel, along with Hannah’s prayer, anticipates the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, as we approach the end of the Church Year and look forward to the beginning of Advent.

Andrew M. Greeley at [agreeley.com](http://agreeley.com) has written:

“Today we begin our annual tour through apocalyptic literature. ... Mark describe(s) the end times, the final reckoning time when the Lord God and His Son Jesus will triumph over sin and death. The apocalyptic writings are charged with poetry, metaphor, fantasy. We must not make the mistake some of the fundamentalists do and interpret these passages literally. However, we must not make the opposite mistake of dismissing them as ‘nothing but’ poetry. Metaphor tells us truth more fully and more adequately than does plain prose. The truth is Heaven and Earth may indeed pass away, but not before the Final Resolution in which good triumphs over evil and life over death. We don’t know when or how that will happen. Those issues really don’t matter. What does matter is that Jesus and His true followers will finally win.”



## IMPLICATIONS

1. The Gospel passage is taken from one of the last conversations Jesus had with four of his closest Apostles. What do you imagine their response might have been to these words of Jesus?

2. What is the point that Jesus makes as he describes the events that will occur at the destruction of the temple?

3. Jesus warns the disciples about those who will come in his name and “lead many astray” (Mk. 13:6). How can we discern God’s voice in the world and in our own lives?

4. In verse 8, Jesus proclaims that the calamitous events he describes are “but the beginning of the birth-pangs.” What

will be born out of these disasters?

5. Every generation experiences war, natural disasters, and other calamities. What are the signs that let us know *God is present* even in the midst of such events?

6. As you read the words of Andrew M. Greeley in the Interpretation section, what is the significance of these apocalyptic visions for us today?

7. All of today’s passages focus on perseverance in faith and hope for the future. What are your dreams for the future? How can the Church bring hope to the world?



**CE—Proper 29-B**  
**November 25, 2012**

**TODAY'S SCRIPTURE**

**2 Samuel 23:1-7; Psalm**  
**132:1-13 (14-19);**  
**Revelation 1:4b-8;**

**John 18:33-37**

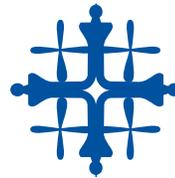
<sup>33</sup>*Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"*  
<sup>34</sup>*Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"* <sup>35</sup>*Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"* <sup>36</sup>*Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."* <sup>37</sup>*Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?"* Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

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# Synthesis CE

A Lectionary Study Guide following the Revised Common Lectionary

## INTERPRETATION

### King of Kings, Lord of Lords

Christ is King! On this last Sunday of the Church Year, we reflect on the image of Christ the King and the nature of the Kingdom he proclaims.

In Israel, unlike in other nations in the ancient Near East, the institution of the monarchy came relatively late in the nation's history. There were those such as the Prophet Samuel who had reservations about the establishment of a hereditary monarchy (1 Sam. 8:10-22). Whereas other kings were often regarded as gods, the Lord God was the only sovereign of Israel (Jer. 10:7-10), the "great King above all gods" (Ps. 95:3). Honoring the covenant between God and Israel also distinguished the monarchy of Israel from that of other nations. A king in Israel was often referred to as the "anointed one" (1 Sam. 2:35), from which the title "messiah" was derived.

David was revered as the greatest of all the kings of Israel, and the one through whom the Messiah would come. The Old Testament passage for today contains David's last words in which he contrasts a just ruler and a wicked ruler. David himself is described as "anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1).

A just king who rules "in the fear of God" (v. 3) is like morning light and refreshing rain. David has ruled according to the everlasting covenant made with the Lord, from whom his power was derived as a gift. Therefore, his household has prospered, and God has promised an everlasting dynasty for David's heirs. In contrast, godless rulers are like thorns to be thrown away and immediately consumed by fire.

The description of the exalted Christ in the Book of Revelation provides a vision of the celestial kingdom. Addressing the seven churches, the writer begins with blessings of peace in the style of Paul's letters. The source of blessing is the Divine One "who is and who was and who is to come," along with the "seven spirits" or seven archangels who serve God and Jesus himself (1:4).

The victorious and exalted Christ of the vision is described as the faithful witness, the first from among the dead in his victorious Resurrection, and "ruler of the kings of the earth" (v. 5). By his love for us we are freed from sin through his blood. As Christ's redeemed, we are ourselves a kingdom and priests to God the Father. Verse 7 reflects the language of the vision of Daniel (Dan. 7:13), as Christ comes in the clouds where "every eye will see him." Then all the tribes who rejected him will cry out in fear of the coming judgment.

The Lord God is Alpha, the beginning, through whom all things were made; and Omega, the ending to whom all must come. Here all the ends and purposes of life and history are brought together through the One "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (v. 8b).

The Gospels frequently applied royal imagery to Jesus, beginning with the ar-

rival of the Magi, who ask, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?” (Mt. 2:2). Matthew also established that Jesus was of the royal Davidic lineage (Mt. 1:1). Although Jesus is accused of royal pretensions (Lk. 23:2), he resists all efforts to make him king. After the feeding of the five thousand, the crowd follows Jesus to “take him by force to make him king” (Jn. 6:15). When Jesus enters Jerusalem, the crowd proclaims, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Lk. 19:38).

The royal status of Jesus is a major point of Pontius Pilate’s interrogation of Jesus in the Gospel of John. However, in the passage for today, a beaten and scorned Jesus hardly seems kingly. He had been flogged, dressed in a purple robe with a crown of thorns, and mocked by the soldiers: “Hail, King of the Jews!” (Jn. 19:3).

As this dramatic confrontation begins, Pilate asks Jesus point-blank, “Are you the King of the Jews?” (18:33). Although this question is asked by Pilate in all of the Gospel accounts (Mt. 27:11; Mk. 15:2; Lk. 23:3), only John records a lengthy response by Jesus.

Roman law required a definite accusation, even for the punishment of noncitizens. Pilate had dealt with other nationalist rebels, and Jesus did not seem a violent terrorist. Jesus had already been found guilty by the Jewish authorities, and now Pilate sought to verify the vague charges against him.

Jesus, in his public ministry, had avoided the title of Messiah because it represented a distortion of his objectives; nevertheless, some of his actions had raised messianic hopes in the minds of the people. Thus Pilate asks Jesus directly if he is the King of the Jews.

Instead of affirming or denying the accusation, Jesus simply inquires whether Pilate asks this question on his own, or heard others say this about him? Pilate contemptuously replies that since he (Pilate) is not a Jew, the issue is really between Jesus and the Jewish religious authorities, and therefore has nothing to do with him.

In verse 36, Jesus defines the sense in which he is indeed a king. “My Kingdom is not from this world.” Jesus’ Kingdom has no boundaries in the present world. If the Kingdom

that Jesus proclaimed belonged in any sense to the temporal world, he would not have been handed over without a fight from his followers. The fact that there had been no conflict—nothing more than Peter’s impulsive attack on the High Priest’s slave—

demonstrated the falsity of the charge brought against him. Jesus again reiterates this fact: “But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

Pilate’s only context for the idea of kingship was political and not theological; thus he once again asks Jesus, “So are you a king?” (v. 37a). Jesus then replies that he has come into the world to bring a reign of truth, and those to whom truth is meaningful will give heed to his word. In him, the world can see the nature of God most fully.

In Jesus there is no personal vanity or desire for aggrandizement at the expense of others. He came to serve and not to be served. His Kingdom would create a new community of believers who would hear and obey his voice. Jesus rules through grace and love in a realm of spirit and life in which justice and peace shine out for all. This was the saving truth that was being offered to the whole world, and is the essential meaning of our proclaiming *Christ as King*.

In a final twist of irony, Pilate ordered the inscription over the cross of Jesus to read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” When the chief priest insisted that it be changed to read, “This man said, I am King of the Jews,” Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written” (Jn. 19:19-22).

Mary W. Anderson wrote in *The Christian Century* (Nov. 15, 2003):

“Here at the end of the church year, after living through another cycle of hearing the story of Jesus’ life, of being taught by him in miracle and parable, we come to the coda of this hymn of praise. After another year of living our lives, burying our dead, baptizing our babies, marrying and divorcing, struggling and thriving, we bring all of the year’s experiences to the climax of this day. We lay it all back at the feet of the one enthroned on the cross, giving thanks. It’s great to be a people ruled in love and mercy.”



## Christ rules as King in love and mercy.

### IMPLICATIONS

1. This last Sunday of the Church Year is celebrated as Christ the King Sunday. What are some of the words, phrases, and images that come to mind when you think of a king?

2. As you read the Gospel passage in which Jesus appears before Pilate, how would you characterize Jesus’ words and actions in this situation? How do his actions contrast with those of Pilate?

3. What does Jesus mean when he tells Pilate “my kingdom is not from here” (Jn. 18:36)? What is Pilate’s understanding of kings, kingdoms, power, and authority as opposed to the teachings of Jesus?

4. How does Jesus describe the Kingdom that he brings?

How do you see this Kingdom revealed in the world?

5. In verse 37, Jesus declares that he came into the world “to testify to the truth.” How would you describe the truth that Jesus brings? How are we as followers of Jesus called to be witnesses to this truth?

6. Today we proclaim Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. What is the relevance of the concept of kingship in contemporary democratic culture?

7. In light of today’s readings, what does the kingship of Jesus represent? How are we to respond as members of his Kingdom? What will the world be like once it is brought together under the rule of Christ?

