

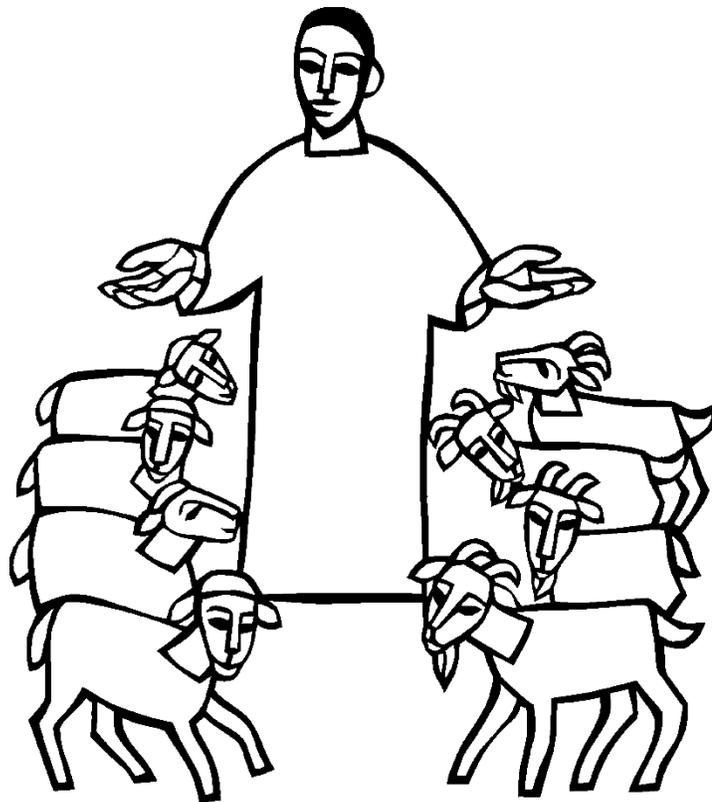


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**Christ the King
Morning Prayer Rite Two
Sunday, November 22, 2020**

PRELUDE Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart H 488

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
all else be nought to me, save that thou art—
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
thou my great Father; thine own may I be;
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

High King of heaven, when victory is won,
may I reach heaven's joys, bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish, ca. 700; versified Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880-1931); tr. Eleanor H. Hull (1860-1935), alt.

These words are in the public domain.

OPENING SENTENCE

The Officiant says

Grace to you and peace from God our Maker and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Philippians 1:2

CONFESSION OF SIN

The Officiant says to the people

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God our heavenly Creator, to set forth God's praise, to hear God's holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things that are necessary for our life and our salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship God, let us kneel in silence, and

with penitent and obedient hearts confess our sins, that we may obtain forgiveness by God's infinite goodness and mercy.

Silence may be kept.

Officiant and People together, all kneeling

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Priest alone stands and says

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. *Amen.*

VERSICLE

Officiant Lord, open our lips.

People And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Officiant and People

Glory to the holy and undivided Trinity, one God: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen. Alleluia.

ANTIPHON

Christ has triumphed over death: O come let us worship.

INVITATORY

O God, be merciful to us and bless us, *
show us the light of your countenance and come to us.
Let your ways be known upon earth, *
your saving health among all nations.
Let the peoples praise you, O God; *
let all the peoples praise you.
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, *
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide all the nations upon earth.
Let the peoples praise you, O God; *
let all the peoples praise you.

PSALM: Psalm 95, 1-7a

Venite, exultemus

- ¹ Come, let us sing to the HOLY ONE; *
let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.
- ² Let us come before God's presence with thanksgiving *
and raise a loud shout with psalms.
- ³ For you, O God, are a great God, *
you are great above all gods.
- ⁴ In your hand are the caverns of the earth, *
and the heights of the hills are yours also.

⁵ The sea is yours, for you made it, *
and your hands have molded the dry land.

⁶ Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, *
and kneel before God our Maker.

⁷ For you are our God,
and we are the people of your pasture and the sheep of your
hand.

At the end of the Psalm is sung or said

Glory to the holy and undivided Trinity, one God, *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

A reading from the book of Psalms.

The Lessons

FIRST READING: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

The people sit.

A Reading from the book of the book of Ezekiel.

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.

Reader The Word of the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

Silence may follow.

FIRST CANTICLE

Canticle N: A Song of God's Love

Beloved, let us love one another, *
for love is of God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, *
for God is Love.

In this the love of God was revealed among us, *
that God sent God's only Son into the world,
so that we might live through Jesus Christ.

In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us *
and sent his Son that sins might be forgiven.
Beloved, since God loved us so much, *
we ought also to love one another.
For if we love one another, God abides in us, *
and God's love will be perfected in us.

SECOND READING: Ephesians 1:15-23

The people sit.

A Reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all .

Reader The Word of the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

Silence may follow.

SECOND CANTICLE

Canticle J: A Song of Judith:

I will sing a new song to my God, *
for you are great and glorious, wonderful in strength, invincible.
Let the whole creation serve you, *
for you spoke and all things came into being.
You sent your breath and it formed them, *
no one is able to resist your voice.
Mountains and seas are stirred to their depths, *
rocks melt like wax at your presence.
But to those who fear you, *
you continue to show mercy.
No sacrifice, however fragrant, can please you, *
but whoever fears the Lord shall stand in your sight for ever.

SEQUENCE HYMN

All Hail King Jesus

Moody

All hail King Jesus
All hail Emmanuel
King of kings
Lord of lords
Bright Morning Star
And throughout eternity
I'll sing your praises
And I'll reign with you
Throughout eternity.

CCLI Song # 12877

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THIRD READING: Matthew 25:31-46

The people sit.

A Reading from Matthew.

Jesus said, “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.”

Reader The Word of the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

Silence may follow.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Officiant and People together, all standing.

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He 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,
and is seated at the right hand of God.

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.

The Prayers

SALUTATION

The people stand or kneel

Officiant The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Officiant Let us pray.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Officiant and People

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,
 and the power, and the glory,
 forever and ever. Amen.

SUFFRAGES

Officiant Help us, O God our Savior;

People Deliver us and forgive us our sins.

Officiant Look upon your congregation;

People Give to your people the blessing of peace.

Officiant Declare your glory among the nations;

People And your wonders among all peoples.

Officiant Do not let the oppressed be shamed and turned away;
People Never forget the lives of your poor.

Officiant Continue your loving-kindness to those who know you;
People And your favor to those who are true of heart.

Officiant Satisfy us by your loving-kindness in the morning;
People So shall we rejoice and be glad all the days of our life.

For those in our hearts, especially Connie, Jamie, Kobe, Hayden, Dick, Pat G., Pat S., Amy, Paige, Nancy, Bailey, Norma, Byron, Sharon, JoEY, Helen, Jim, Danielle, Susan, Devon, Bill, Harold, Heather, Amelia, Melissa, David, Karen, Ellie, Tom, Maggie, Sandra, Logan, Jean, Heidi, Mark, Abby, Paul, Carolyn, Ginny, Linda, Joe, Shirley, Sharon, Norm, Joey, Bob and Tom. Are there any others who need our prayers?

We ask your prayers for all those who have died in the hope of the resurrection and their families.

LITANY

Thank you, Lord for taking care of your children.

O God, our rock in times of trial, thank you for being with us all as we face the difficulties that the coronavirus has brought. We feel your presence and are comforted.

You are there with those who are disappointed at not having the joyful celebrations of weddings, family gatherings, graduations and celebrations of life at birth and death. You provide joy to us in other ways, if we just pay attention.

God, hear our Prayer.

You are there with those of us quarantined at home, when we want to be saying words of comfort to those who are far from us. You take our words and whisper them to our loved ones for us.

God, hear our Prayer.

You are there, holding the hand of the sick or dying when their family cannot be with them.

God, hear our Prayer.

You are there protecting and guiding all on the front lines of medical care, vaccine development, police and firefighters and those in the supply chain to provide us food from farmers to truckers to grocery store workers.

God, hear our Prayer.

You are with our clergy who are doing your work under stressful circumstances and providing them with your words of comfort and caring to share with us.

God, hear our Prayer.

Let us never forget that wherever we are, you are there also with us, every step of the way.

In Jesus' name,

Amen

FIRST COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*

Almighty God, our heavenly Creator, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in earth: Deliver us in our various occupations from the service of self alone, that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*

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Prayer of St. Chrysostom

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this word knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. *Amen*

THE GENERAL THANKSGIVING

Officiant and People

Almighty God, Giver of all mercies,
we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks
for all your goodness and loving-kindness
to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation,
and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ;
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies,
that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up our selves to your service,
and by walking before you
in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus
your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away
the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls
that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle
and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good
time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your
heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

Birthdays: Jessica Dixon, David Horn, and Joe Messineo

Anniversaries:

O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your servants as they begin another year. Grant that they may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen their trust in your goodness all the days of their life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

CONCLUDING VERSICLE

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CONCLUDING SENTENCE

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. *Amen.* 2

Corinthians 13:14

POSTLUDE

Majesty

Hayford

Chorus

Majesty worship His majesty
Unto Jesus be all glory
Honor and praise
Majesty kingdom authority
Flow from His throne
Unto His own His anthem raise
So exalt lift up on high
The name of Jesus
Magnify come glorify
Christ Jesus the King
Majesty worship His majesty
Jesus who died now glorified
King of all kings

CCLI Song # 1527

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Online Coffee Fellowship

Join members of the St. A's family on Zoom **Today at 11:30 am (following this service)** for an interactive online social hour.

Sunday School

Our Calendar for the rest of the year is:

December:

6th, Meet Via Zoom 9:30-10:15 AM

13th, Outreach

20th & 27th, Christmas Break

We also plan on creating some fun Instagram/Facebook short videos for you all to enjoy at home!

Elaine Randall Book Club

December's book is **When Books Went to War: The Stories that Helped us Win World War II** by Molly Guptill Manning. Books are available for pickup in the book bag located in the narthex.

Thanksgiving Day Prayer-and-Share, 9:00 am

On Thanksgiving Day this year, we'll have a special opportunity to gather over Zoom for a brief Morning Prayer conducted by Fr Ben, followed by a time to say hello and share thanksgivings and news about the day with our church family. You're invited to join us for prayer at 9:00 am, followed by an open time to say hello and chat as long as we'd like! Zoom details are below.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82475044862?pwd=N2QrYXEyamFLcTFzNHZuUHN4REFiQT09>

Meeting ID: 824 7504 4862

Passcode: 885577

Advent Begins

Just a reminder that the season of Advent begins on **November 29!**

Save the Date for Blue Christmas

We will be offering a Blue Christmas service again this year at **3:00 PM on December 12**. More details will be coming soon.

Christmas Cards for Lessons and Carols!

Our Lessons and Carols service this year will be pre-recorded by Joe Threlkeld. As part of the visuals for this service, Joe is inviting everyone to send in a family Christmas picture or two, which he will add to our worship service. If you have pictures of Christmas events at St Augustine's, you are also welcome to send those in! Joe's e-mail is joethrelkeld@gmail.com, and this will be for our service on **Sunday, December 20 at 10:30 am**.

Sister, Brother, Let Us Serve You

Fr Ben has asked the Daughters of the King to explore the feasibility of a new parish service ministry in response to the many needs the pandemic has created. We are looking for volunteers who would enjoy helping with various service opportunities that would aid parish members. Please fill out our survey to indicate your talents and a preferred way to contact you. <https://forms.gle/kiad9jbPsfLqtpnQ8>

Once we know what services people have offered, we can begin to coordinate people who need help with those who are able to assist. If you have questions, email Dn Pat Sheldon at patsheldon@cox.net Stay tuned for the launch of this ministry, hopefully in early December.

'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' Matthew 25:40

Outreach Collection

The Outreach Committee asks for your donations in November to Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD). ERD works in approximately 40 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the U.S. and the Middle East.

ERD works with local Episcopal and Anglican church partners to rebuild after disasters and empower people to create lasting solutions that fight poverty, hunger and disease. Their programs impact the lives of approximately 3 million people worldwide.

The four core program areas are to:

- Alleviate hunger and improve food supply;
- Create economic opportunities and strengthen communities;
- Promote health and fight disease;
- Respond to disasters and rebuild communities.

Your donations to support Episcopal Relief and Development can be made out to St. Augustine's, with Episcopal Relief and Development (or ERD) in the memo line. Thank you for your support of this vital Episcopal ministry.

COPE Christmas

COPE will not be holding an in-person Christmas Party this year, however they will be holding a drive-up Christmas gift pick-up on December 12.

A few gift tags for St. A parishioners are still available. If you would still like to adopt a family, please email **Julie**, she will send you a photo of the card with your assigned family. Drop-off of gifts and/or gift cards will be the same way on **November 29th, from 12-2PM or November 30th from 5-6PM.**

Please also watch for a sign-up link for a few in-person volunteers we will need on **December 4th and 5th.**

Thank you for your support!

Silent Night Virtual Choir

The Diocese of Nebraska invites the singers among us to consider participating in a diocesan-wide virtual choir! Together, we will sing the classic hymn “Silent Night” to be shared on Christmas Eve via social media. If you or the singers in your parish would like to join us, please [visit this webpage](https://www.dioneb.org/Resources/virtual-choir.html): <https://www.dioneb.org/Resources/virtual-choir.html> for instructions on how to participate. If you have any questions, please email our Director of Communications, Abby Zimmerman, at azimmerman@episcopal-ne.org.

Office Hours

We are now without water and the restrooms are blocked off for construction. Due to this, we are not able to hold gatherings in the church any longer and office staff will be mostly remote.

Please email Jay at parish@sainta.net before you head to church for any reason to be sure she will be there. As always, if you need anything from Fr. Ben or Kate, feel free to email or call.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Permissions and Permits and Our Final Details

We have some good news! **The short version? We received two needed approvals at meetings on November 4th and November 12th, and the City has provided RDG with a final checklist of items they need in order to issue our permit!**

On Wednesday, November 4th, the Omaha Planning Board approved a “major use exception” that allows us to build church property in our residentially-zoned neighborhood. This might seem like a funny requirement, given that we’ve been operating as a church here since the 1980’s, but the city had never formally recorded that, and our expansion triggered a necessary approval. The good news is that they approved it as part of the “consent agenda” – a slate of items so simple they don’t require debate or discussion, unless someone from the community asks that they be removed and reviewed during the meeting. I was in that meeting for about 3 minutes.

The approval was contingent, however, on a second approval at the Zoning Board of Appeals, which met Thursday, November 12th. The issue here was that our western “front-in” parking spaces are technically in both our St Augustine’s property AND the “public right-of-way.” The issue? Technically the city code doesn’t automatically count spaces in the public right-of-way, presumably because then businesses in dense parts of the city could double-count them and create parking and density problems. So we had to get an appeal from the zoning board to lower our required on-site parking ... because we want to acknowledge the 30 stalls that were mostly on-site are always used to help park our cars, too.

We got this approval in short, efficient order, too. Randy, our architect, spoke for a few minutes as a “proponent” making the request, and nobody spoke against it. We walked out with the Zoning Board of Appeals approval to reduce the parking count required in our design (e.g., to recognize our on-street parking as part of the count, essentially). This also satisfied the Planning Board’s condition for our use exemption.

On Sunday, November 15, our Vestry met to review two construction possibilities. Essentially, we want to control costs based on which parts of the project will take place during the winter, and we know that better now that we've cleared some city questions and can reasonably expect permitting soon.

The default option would be to build under the original schedule, sort of "ground up" with concrete pours first, followed by framing, and then interior work. A second option the contractor worked up they called "build in a box." It has some slightly higher costs to mobilize some of their subcontractors more than once, but it allows them better control, essentially by pouring concrete footings first, then framing the building, then pouring interior concrete (under conditions they can now somewhat control, hedging against surprise snow costs or delays). While it added some cost, it also narrowed the field of unknowns and allows the contractor much more security in scheduling people. The Vestry circled around the option with more control and a tighter range of costs pretty immediately; ultimately, someone asked our contractor what they believed we should do, and he acknowledged he also thought that was the better option. The Vestry approved that plan by a formal vote.

The last steps for permitting? Randy has just this week received a "Corrections Report" – a document that asks the architect and contractor to demonstrate particular details the city wants to make sure are up to code. He believes these are all final details that can be turned around very quickly, and we will be seeking a permit ASAP.

Stay tuned for demolition details! We're planning to go out and do a Facebook live video, as well as having a small number of members take pictures, and we'll be announcing the final details as soon as we have them! As always, please feel free to contact Fr Ben with any questions!

Fr Ben +

RECTOR'S REFLECTION

Thursday, November 19, 2020

A few decades back, a trilogy of movies came out under the cryptic name “The Matrix.” They were jammed with new-technology CGI spectacle and inch-deep freshman philosophy, borrowing their notes pretty heavily from Plato’s famous metaphor of the Cave from Book VII of *The Republic*. In *Republic*, the metaphor of the Cave is Plato’s indictment of a society that didn’t reflect on how it was manipulated: people were chained up inside of a cave, and were made to watch a shadow puppet show, projected onto the cave wall in front of them by manipulators behind them, working a fire and objects to create the illusion of reality. Plato pointed out that if you could break the chains and drag someone out of there, they’d go kicking and screaming, and would hate the real world outside, since the brighter light would burn their eyes at first. Instead, they’d opt for the comfortable, known world.

The Matrix took that up with gusto. Their cave? A computer-generated world (the Matrix) where your mind could live a basically comfortable life. The real world outside? A devastated and harsh landscape, with human bodies plugged into energy-generating tubes (in defiance of all basic biology about how life requires energy, but hey, it’s fiction). The shadow manipulators? Robots that have broken free and risen to become our conquerors, since apparently humans in this terrible future have just as much trouble getting along with beings different than ourselves as we have in every age.

The Matrix delivers its key connections to the metaphor with memorable images: take the right pill and you wake up in the painful “real world” with your illusions shattered. Or consider the case of one of the human enablers, who makes a convicting declaration along the lines of “I know that when I eat this steak, it’s the Matrix telling me it’s juicy and delicious ... and I don’t care.” In other words, I’d rather be comfortable than see reality.

That piece always makes me think about the Exodus story, and the people who escape from the oppressions of Pharaoh, only to find that the wilderness life is hard, too. They’re finally in actual relationship with God, and free to be their own people ... but as they face the difficult journey and the real work of daily life, Egypt starts looking good in the rear-view mirror, even if that

means lying to themselves about how bad Egypt was, and forgetting about God again. It's a serious lesson for us about how hard it is for us to change, even when it is literally God asking us to, and promising that there's a better life ahead.

There are other beautiful writings about the pain of coming to the real world. Margery Williams' book, *The Velveteen Rabbit* has the subtitle "Or How Toys Become Real," and has a famous passage where a worn-down rocking horse teaches the young rabbit toy that it's okay that the children have loved it so much that its tail-hair has all been pulled and its shiny coat worn out and one of its button eyes used up to repair a doll – because this is the matter of real love, and it has made the horse real. Later, the rabbit would go through its own transformation by being the beloved toy the child clutches through a sickness. The Toy Story franchise by Pixar probably owes something to this book, as it takes up heart-wrenching sequences where beloved family keepsakes are worn-out ... but all the more important because of all the playtime that took that toll.

Or there's CS Lewis's image of God making toy soldiers into real beings in his famous book, *Mere Christianity*. Lewis writes that some of the soldiers might hate coming to life, and might prefer to be made of tin. He might think the tin is being spoiled, when in fact, he's being brought to the life he was always meant to have.

The Cave, the Matrix, the Skin Horse and the Rabbit, the tin soldiers ... and the people God saved from Egypt through a wilderness journey – the journey towards the real love and real life we're supposed to have isn't always easy. It's hard to leave behind familiar comforts, or familiar stories about who we are. It's hard to admit we still need to grow. It's hard to admit we need God to help us see more clearly than we've been able to yet. Often, it's hard to admit we made mistakes, or that our hearts or minds were too small, when we were just made of tin, or trapped in the small life that Egypt let us have.

But there's a powerful goodness to that news, too.

The goodness is this: when we find that the journey God calls us to has become hard, or painful, that's something more than an obstacle. Often, it's a sign that we've actually discovered the work Jesus gives us to do: take up your cross, and follow me. When we experience difficulty, we're often very near to divinity. When we feel embarrassed or ashamed, it's a sign that we've

noticed that God can make us bigger, if we can do the hard work of repentance and accept the grace that God – who is bigger than we are – has offered to us. If we find that the story we thought we knew about who we are has terrible cracks in it, that’s often a clue that the crack can be crawled through towards the true light, by which God shows all of us real love, and a community that is big enough to welcome us all home to God and one another.

In our current moment, when we are facing serious hardship in order to protect one another, we’re living out some of these stories. We may have been dragged out to the harsh daylight that stopping the virus’s spread is going to require more of us than we wanted to give up. We might be experiencing the hard realization that the wilderness journey is going to last longer than we thought. We might be wishing we could plug back in to the Matrix and pretend the real world isn’t there. We might be ferociously lamenting the pain or the hardship we’ve had to take on, or just exhausted from having to fight the same fight over and over again.

But the journey to the real world is the one that we’re called to. The work that we do is holy, for we’re following a path where Jesus calls on us to love one another, in the particular ways required by this moment. And at the end of the story is God, with arms wide open, waiting for us to all come home.

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