

The Feast of Christ the King

The Feast of Christ the King brings our liturgical year to a close. It is very fitting that we conclude another year reminding ourselves who it is that truly deserves our unwavering loyalty, constant praise, and our deepest love; none other than the Lord of Heaven and Earth, and indeed the King of the entire Universe; Jesus Christ!

Today we hear the familiar parable of the sheep and the goats, the very last parable Jesus tells in Matthew's Gospel, as it paints a grand scene in which Jesus is pictured as a King and Judge, where everyone from all the nations is before his judgment seat.

It is good to ponder this reality of the general and last judgement of Christ the King, when all the human race from cavemen and women, to early American Indians, Eskimos, ancient peoples of Africa, Asians, Indigenous people of Australia, all Europeans, Russians, lawyers, rock stars, priests and popes, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Scientologists, New age devotees, humanists, all, liberal, conservative, and corrupt politicians, Hamas and other terrorists of all times, atheists, Catholics and Christians of all denominations, including each an everyone of us will ultimately have to answer the King of Kings and Lord of Lords; the Risen Christ. Justice will be served to all without exception; it's only a matter of time. While we do not have to take this passage in a literal sense, the truth that everyone will be accountable for their actions and choices in life

remains firm and constant. This is the first point of this gospel passage, that God's rule in Jesus is eternal and his justice will last forever for all the souls ever created.

So what do we need to do to be on the right side of the Judgement scene? What is the measure by which we will be judged? We won't be judged based on our theological positions and philosophical understandings as important as they are, nor it will be based on our political views, education, or achievements in life.

According to this Gospel passage and indeed the whole Gospel, we will be judged based on our treatment of those in need, for the Lord says 'What you did for the least of my brothers, you did it to me'. The gospel offers a picture of the kind of community where Jesus sees himself to be recognized. The presence of Jesus is hidden among the poor and the vulnerable: where their needs are recognized, Jesus is acknowledged. When the hungry are fed, when those who thirst are offered drink, when strangers are offered hospitality, when the naked are covered in dignity, when the sick are seen to, and when prisoners are visited, Jesus himself is touched by mercy. Their vulnerability is his vulnerability; he is present where human need is greatest.

What the Gospel wishes to communicate with great seriousness is that the final outcome of one's existence is irreversibly determined by the attitude one takes towards fellow human beings here and now, as Jesus elsewhere in the

Gospel (23:23) describes as 'the weightier matters of the law': 'justice, mercy, and faith'.

Here the 'greatest commandment of the law' – the twin love of God and one's neighbour (22:36-40) – and the Matthean sense of 'Immanuel' ('God with us') receive a most radical extension. Jesus 'Immanuel' so identifies with even 'the least' of his 'brothers and sisters' that effective compassion shown or not shown to them is shown or not shown to him. There is no need to wait for the Son of Man to come in judgment; every time one encounters a fellow human being in need one already stands before the Judge and King.

So each of us should ask ourselves when was the last time we looked after Christ the King in a fellow human being?

We should refresh our memory of the seven works of corporal mercy and the spiritual acts of mercy according to the catholic tradition which includes feeding the hungry, visiting the imprisoned, burying the dead, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, giving shelter to travellers, and offering a drink to the thirsty; instructing the ignorant, counselling the doubtful, admonishing the sinner, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offenses willingly, comforting the afflicted and praying for the living and the dead.

However, it is important to note that this parable is not speaking of a humanism detached from faith and religion. It is not saying that faith, theology, liturgy, and worship are not important and we should all just do social work and charity. Nevertheless, the gospel is challenging all religious people who claim

that they have faith, that if our faith in Christ is truly authentic we will be naturally disposed to caring for the least among us through corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

If our worship is truly transformational, if we are truly empowered by the Holy Spirit, if our theology is truly orthodox and catholic, if our prayer is truly authentic then we will recognize Christ in the poor. Otherwise, as the scriptures say, we are a bunch of liars and hypocrites. 1 John 4:20 – "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or a sister is a liar"

Finally, it is important, to note that the sin of those left out of the kingdom and set to darkness is not that they caused harm to those in need nor to anyone else for that matter. Their sin was that they did nothing! Absolutely nothing! They looked the other way, they were indifferent to the pain of others. We will be judged not only for what wrong we did but also as importantly for what we failed to do.

So, this is a truly majestic and challenging gospel. First, it reminds us of the final judgment by Christ the King that no one can escape where one's eternal destiny will be determined by the measure of our love of Christ shown in the practical care of those in need. It also reminds us of the stark truth that we will be separated from God not only for doing wrong but also for being indifferent to the sufferings of others, which is very much prevalent today. "Whatever you do to the least of these, you are doing to me, what you failed to do for them, you failed to do to me" –

These are both comforting and disturbing words because they teach us that the proof of how much we love the Lord, of how much he is alive in us, is found not in spiritual and religious theatrics but in how we treat others around us.

Can we see Christ in others? Can others see Christ in us? Are we Christ to anybody? The answer to these questions tells the truth about us, about our faith, and our eternal destiny. If our answer needs help, let us not lose hope! A whole new liturgical year is starting next week, with the beginning of Advent! Let us have a new beginning or renew our faith and love once again for God and our neighbour!