

Homily for Christ the King

Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. At the end of time, this king will come in glory to judge the living and the dead. He will ask how we treated the hungry and thirsty, the stranger, the naked, those sick or in prison. In the passage from the prophet Ezekiel, it is God Himself who will come personally to tend his sheep because the entrusted shepherds have not been found worthy of their charge. God will take care of the sick and ailing sheep but will separate and punish those who have made themselves strong at the expense of the weak. God says, "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 my sheep with justice." St. Matthew's Gospel completes this pastoral image with Jesus' account of future certain events. Each person will be distinguished as a sheep or a goat according to a simple standard of practical attention to those who suffer. St. Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth of the fact of the resurrection from the dead. One day, all those who have walked their living faith in Christ will resurrect from the dead to receive their salvation and to be glorified in Christ. Those who belong to Christ will form part of His kingdom. In this Kingdom all will be subject to Christ the King. Further, the Psalm 23 sings of the Lord as the Good Shepherd who will feed, guide and protect His sheep. It is in the Lord that true goodness is to be found. *A little girl and her father were crossing a bridge. The father was kind of scared so he asked his little daughter, "Sweetheart, please hold my hand so that you don't fall into the river." The little girl said, "No, Dad. You hold my hand." "What's the difference?" asked the puzzled father. "There's a big difference," replied the little girl. "If I hold your hand and something happens to me, chances are that I may let your hand go. But if you hold my hand, I know for sure that no matter what happens, you will never let my hand go."*

The Gospel is of a future, final judgment. We think that certain people are the "least". Now we realise they are sacred, divine in fact, since what we did to them we did to Christ and what we refused them we refused to Christ. We think that we meet Christ by doing extraordinary things. Now we realise that it is in very mundane things, giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, visiting the sick and those in prison. We think we meet Christ in moments of prayer or in holy places. Now we realise that we meet him when we feed and clothe those in need, when we visit hospitals and prisons. We realise that leadership in religious organisations counts for nothing before God. In his judgement, the only thing that counts is humble service.

As always in the bible, the judgement causes two reactions and we have experienced them both at different times: wonderful relief at knowing we were right. Terrible sadness when we realise that we have missed the boat. The contrast with the virtuous is striking; for them it was a homecoming, whereas with the wicked they feel deep alienation – the fire was "prepared for the devil and his angels", they "go away" to their fate. There are two basic types of people in the world: those who care about God and others, and those who focus their attention solely on themselves. To which type do we belong? Jesus taught that when we help the needy we are actually helping him. That is why when Mother Teresa of Calcutta was asked how she could touch a disease-ridden man, she said that she was not touching him but touching Jesus. Remember that while our salvation depends on the grace of Christ, it also depends on our choices during this life.