

Christ the King - A  
Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17;  
I Corinthians 15:20-26, 28;  
Matthew 25:31-46  
Little Flower - 11/22/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

On this the last Sunday of the Church year, we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King.

Jesus is a Shepherd-King. In today's reading from Ezekiel, God's description of his relationship with Israel parallels Jesus' description of his relationship with us in the Gospels. According to Ezekiel, God cares for, rescues, feeds, and gives rest to his people. In John's Gospel, Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Through Ezekiel God said, *"The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal..."* In Luke's Gospel, Jesus said, *"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost"* [19:10]. In Ezekiel, God also said he would *"judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats."* In today's Gospel, Jesus describes the Last Judgment.

Jesus' teaching in today's Gospel is critically important because it is the only time Jesus presents the criteria by which we will be judged. We immediately notice two things. First, the practice of religion is not mentioned among the criteria. There is no mention of prayer or church attendance. However, in the context of the entire Gospel, it would be very wrong to conclude that practicing our religion is not important. Likewise, the Ten Commandments are not mentioned. Again, in the context of the entire Gospel, it would be very wrong to conclude that keeping the Ten Commandments is not important.

Praying, attending Eucharist, and keeping the Ten Commandments are some of the things that good Catholics do best. Jesus, however, is suggesting that they are not enough. Jesus will judge us by how we have reached out to and helped those most in need: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner.

When I was on retreat one year, the retreat master offered an insight into the passage that I had never thought about. Both the righteous and the wicked will ask Jesus, *"Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?"* Essentially, they will both ask the same questions. Their questions suggest that the righteous did not see Christ in others any more than the wicked did. The difference was that they reached out in compassion toward others simply for the sake of the others, not because they saw Christ in them. To the good, Jesus will respond, *"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."* Jesus identifies himself with those most in need. When we serve our brothers and sisters in need, we bring Christ to them, but they also bring Christ to us.

People, however, not only have physical needs. They also have emotional needs. One author paraphrased Jesus' words to the blessed: *"Whatever you do to the least of my brethren you do to me. When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat. And I don't mean hungry for food; I mean hungry for affection and understanding. When I was thirsty for someone's arms around me, you put yours around me. When I was locked in prison, in the prison of my self-doubt, you came and you visited me. When I was naked, when I was stripped of all self-respect, nobody else cared, you cared. You clothed me. Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you do to the least of my brethren you do to me."*

My brothers and sisters, because of the pandemic, many people are suffering physically, emotionally, socially, economically, and spiritually. Today's Gospel challenges us to reach out compassionately to those in need. Today's Gospel challenges us to be sensitive to the real needs of others and then do what we are able to do to meet those needs. Today's Gospel challenges us to be bearers of hope in these challenging and difficult times.