

Year A
Christ the King
November 26, 2023
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
Psalm 100
Ephesians 1:15-23
Matthew 25:31-46

Do you remember last year on Christ the King Sunday? We were across the street at Carter Hall, because our furnace was broken, and we were still waiting for some parts of the new one to arrive from overseas. And Szymon had only just joined us. What a difference a year makes! Now we're warm and snug here now, with a new, much more efficient furnace, AND amazing music to celebrate today's feast day.

And, today is the Feast of Christ the King. You might remember that it is one of the newest feast days on the liturgical calendar. Yes, we have always hailed Jesus Christ as our King, but it wasn't until 1925 that Pope Pius XI instituted this feast day, in order to counteract what he saw as the rampant moral and ethical decline in the world's leadership. Around the world at that time he saw fascism, totalitarianism, racism, militarism, secularism and violence. Pius said this kind of rulership was in direct contradiction to what Jesus called leaders to be. So he held Jesus up on this day to illustrate what *true* kingship should look like—what *true* leadership should be.

And today we see exactly this very different royal image in our gospel lesson from Matthew. Not a King clothed in rich robes, but a servant leader who identifies with the lowliest members of his kingdom. This King says he was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison. Jesus, our King says he WAS these people—not that these people represented him, but that he WAS them. Our King says that when he experienced these things on earth, some people helped him, and others did not. Some people welcomed him, fed him, clothed him, cared for him, visited him—and others did not.

He says, “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.” This is our charge, my friends. We are to work to see the face of Christ in everyone, but

especially to those whom Jesus calls “the least of these.” We are to see the face of Christ in the most vulnerable people in our society, and love them, comfort them, feed them, welcome them. And again, this is not romantic love, but *agapé* love. *Agapé* is wanting the highest good for that other person. It’s not warm and fuzzy, but respectful, sacrificial and active.

Jesus tells his disciples this story of the end times not to frighten them, but to inform them of what is expected. Our King wants us to know that the most important thing is not creed, doctrine, or theology, or religious practice, but whether we saw the face of Jesus in the needy, and responded in giving and love. That is the primary criterion between the sheep and the goats, and he wants everyone to know it. Then we will respond with the overflowing love that he gives to us, because we will not have the excuse of ignorance. The goats didn’t know—you see? They ask when did they fail their King. They are shocked to even think it. And Jesus tells 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*.”

So now we are informed, and we have no excuse not to be one of the sheep—we have no excuse not to work to love our neighbors, and to serve them. And it’s not about earning our salvation through good works. No—we got rid of that notion hundreds of years ago. No, it’s about responding to God’s love for us by sharing that love with others. To stop obsessing about ourselves and focus on others, and the presence of God in the world. Realizing that the presence of God is in your screaming teenager. That Jesus is in the homeless person panhandling at the stoplight. Christ is present in the sibling or cousin or uncle that you can’t stand the sight of. It is very simple. Not easy, but it is simple. And now that we know what is expected, we don’t have the excuse of ignorance.

And we have help. Because our King is always with us and in us, he will help us in loving one another. As we say in our baptismal covenant, we will with God’s help. Because we need God’s help with hard things, and it’s good to ask for help when we need it. That’s all you need to say, “God help me with this.” Or even just “help!” God hears you. And as we

do what Jesus calls us to do, we can, as it says many places in the New Testament, all become reconciled to Christ. That *all* people may be the sheep, so to speak.

As Americans we don't have an earthly king, but as Christians we do serve a heavenly one. We serve a King like no other King, who loves us beyond measure, and who calls us to love and serve him as well. Watch for the King in the face of your neighbors, and ask for his help to love them. Amen.

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