

**Homily for November 20, 2005
Christ the King (A)**

By Father Charles Bowes

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

Psalm 23:1-3, 5-6

1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Matthew 25:31-46

We meet Christ by how we aid the broken dimensions of others and of ourselves.

The famous sorting of sheep from goats in Saint Matthew chapter 25 (echoed by the imagery of Ezekiel in the first reading) can too easily deteriorate into a moral checklist: Did I or did we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and the like?

While undeniably crucial, the readings make the wider point of why such actions matter not just to relieve suffering but for eternity: All creation is destined for a consummation in God, and all that is not Godly can have no place. We all have a hand in bringing about and being a part of the new creation.

Before the actual judgment, no one is aware of belonging either to the sheep or to the goats. Both the included and the excluded are surprised. The reason for the surprise is that the final judgment is based on who has given loving care to needy people. Nothing is said here about professing faith in Jesus, divine grace, or even the forgiveness of sin. It is not that these latter things are unimportant. What is being taught here is that at the heart of the gospel is the call to love God and neighbor. This commitment is actualized in concrete acts of loving care for those who are in need. Responding to the needy is equal to responding to Christ himself. Failure to do so is equal to rejecting Christ.

Our Christ the King reigns over all who have been beaten down by life, who may even have given up the struggle. Indeed, Christ the King identifies precisely with

us this way. He tells us that when we find such people, we are to pick them up and give them food and drink and shelter and clothing and, most of all, hope. And if we fail to do this, we will suffer the consequences. The punishment of which the Gospel speaks is not suddenly sprung on people. They chose a way of living that led to it. Should they have been warned in advance? Women and men of good will everywhere believe they should care for the needy. Driven by selfishness, some people choose not to. What is our fundamental option in life? Looking at the broad sweep of years of living, are we mainly selfish or loving?

Salvation is promised to those who do the simple, humanitarian gestures of love and care for the abandoned and forgotten people of the earth. What intrigues me is how salvation is contained in simple acts of everyday life, not in heroic spirituality that is unattainable by many people. We meet Christ in the needy and are judged by our willingness or failure to respond. The entire passage is a clarion call for faithful people to meet the needs of people at a basic level of daily existence. It is a calling we share with all humanity – no matter the presence or absence of a religious creed.

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