

SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THE KING (A)

Last Sunday in the Church Year

Matthew 25:31-46

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Wichita, Kansas

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In both the Apostles' Creed and in the Nicene Creed, we confess our faith that Christ "*will come again to judge the living and the dead.*" I think it fair to say that in the Gospels, Jesus does not spend a majority of his time teaching about his coming again in judgement. Nevertheless, on this Christ the King Sunday, in today's Gospel, our Lord does teach very clearly that he will indeed come again, and he will judge the living and the dead:

*When the Son of man comes in his glory...
Before him will be gathered all the nations,
and he will separate them one from another
as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,
and he will place the sheep at his right hand,
but the goats at the left.
Then the King will say to those at his right hand,
'Come, O blessed of my Father,
inherit the kingdom prepared for you
from the foundation of the world...
[And] he will say to those at his left hand,
'Depart from me, you cursed,
into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels...
And they will go away into eternal punishment,
but the righteous into eternal life.'* (vs. 31-34, 41)

Now to be sure, Jesus makes it clear, elsewhere in his teaching, that his kingship is a reign of *love*, not fear — nevertheless in today's Gospel, he is impressing upon us, and all Christians throughout time, that there *will* be a judgement! There will be a separation of the sheep from the goats. The sheep — the righteous — will be taken to the kingdom prepared for them, to eternal life. But the goats will go away into eternal punishment, to the fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Jesus affirms that He is, Christ the *King* — and He will come and be our judge, ready or not, whether we want to be judged, or not. And He tells us this, not necessarily to strike fear into our hearts; not ultimately to make us feel guilty — but rather to drive us to repentance. To drive us to amendment of life. To drive us, now, to see Him, in the faces of the needy in our midst — so that now, our lives may be re-oriented — to do the works of the kingdom — to do works of love, justice and mercy.

Lutheran pastor, Edward Markquart comments on today's text, and he

writes the following:

I love my children...[much. I love them unconditionally]. But I still ask my children... “Have you done your work today? Have you done your jobs today? Have you taken out the garbage? Did you do the dishes? Did you make your bed? Did you clean your room? Did you do your homework? Did you do your confirmation lesson?”

Do you know how many times I have asked my children, “Did you do the work that I gave you to do?” My excessive love for my children is great, but I still ask the question, “What did you do today?”

This is also true of God...God’s love for you is great, but God still asks you and me the question: “Have you done your chores today?...Did you take care of the sick, the poor, the orphans, the starving, the thirsty, the refugees, the homeless, the hungry, the lonely in the nursing homes? Have you done your chores today?”

That God asks you that question does not mean that God does not love you. It’s just the opposite. Because God does love you...[He] asks you the question. Have you done your chores?

(Our Final Day in Court or Here Comes 'da Judge)

We can learn several things from Jesus’ parable about doing these works of love, justice and mercy.

First of all, they are simple things. Jesus doesn’t say you must travel the world, you must go to east Africa or to the slums of India, and minister to the starving children — although that may be the calling of some. Rather, Jesus says, give food to the hungry, welcome a stranger, care for a sick person, visit someone in prison. You don’t have to do all those things every day — but we all have opportunity regularly, to do each of those things. Right here, you can bring groceries for the food pantry, which goes directly to feed hungry people. Right here, on any given Sunday, you can welcome a stranger, a guest or a visitor. In your own family, you can care for a sick person — you can care for someone who’s ill, or lonely, or depressed, or struggling. You can ring bells for the Salvation Army. You can serve breakfast at St. Paul’s, or a meal at the Lord’s Diner.

It’s freeing, really, that our Lord Jesus doesn’t say, that you must give away thousands of dollars, or become famous, or rule the world. It’s freeing, really, that Jesus doesn’t say we must solve the whole problem of poverty or world hunger. He doesn’t say you must be great parents, or be the best spouse in the whole world. He just calls you to help to the people you meet every day. It’s showing love, and justice, and mercy, to your family, to your co-workers, to your neighbors. It’s doing those things that you are called upon to do, by those around

you, just because it's the right thing to do. Surprisingly enough, never realizing you are doing it, for Jesus himself.

Secondly, these acts of love, justice and mercy, are to be for the sake of the person in need. Those who helped in the parable, never thought that they were helping Jesus and so piling up eternal merits. They weren't helping with one eye on the person in need, and another on Jesus in heaven, to make sure he was seeing and marking down the appropriate points. No. They helped because they couldn't stop themselves. They helped because that's simply what disciples of Jesus do. Those who love and follow Jesus do acts of love, justice and mercy — not because they're trying to earn their way into heaven, but simply because someone is in need. Because we have been loved and helped, by God. Because God has shown us justice and mercy, we do the same, in turn, to the neighbor in need. The disciple of Jesus, more and more, loses selfishness, loses greed and self-centeredness, and gains, the mind and heart of Christ, which loves God and others, above all else.

Which brings up a final aspect of Jesus' teaching — the wonderful truth that though we act for the sake of the person in need, we are giving help, love, and mercy, to Jesus himself.

Two great examples of this are Francis of Assisi and Martin of Tours. Francis was healthy and well-born, and known to be a carouser, who cared for no one and nothing but himself. One day as he was out riding, Francis met a leper. And he was repulsed by the ugliness of the man's disease. But something moved Francis to dismount, approach the leper and embrace this wretched sufferer — and as he did so, the face of the leper changed into the face of Jesus.

A similar thing happened with Martin of Tours. Martin was a Roman soldier, but he was not a Christian. One cold winter day, as he was entering a city, a beggar stopped him and asked him for alms. Martin had no money, but as the beggar was cold and shivering, Martin took off his soldier's cloak — worn and frayed though it was. He tore it in two, and gave half of it to the beggar. That night, Martin had a dream. In his dream, he saw the heavenly places and all the angels, and Jesus in the midst of them. And Christ was wearing half of a Roman soldier's cloak. One of the angels asked, "*Lord, where did you get that tattered old cloak?*" And Jesus answered, "*My servant, Martin gave it to me.*" Martin's biographer writes that straight away, Martin flew to be baptized.

The point is not that these were saints who did great things — but rather that saints are simply people — as Mother Teresa once said — who ***do simple things with great love***. The point is that we are saints — sheep, in the eyes of Christ our King — we are saints, when we do ***simple things with great love***. When we do everyday acts of love, justice and mercy — not for the sake of winning salvation, but for the sake of the person in need.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

