

Homily-Christ the King

This weekend we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King which is the last weekend of the Church year.

The Gospel that we hear today is a challenging Gospel. How are we to understand this call to love the least among us? At the heart of being Catholic are prayer, evangelization and love. This love must be lived out constantly in our lives. Love for those who suffer and who are considered least by the standards of this world is to flow from this daily love.

Think about the love within a family. A husband is to love his wife continuously and a wife her husband. The same is true of the love of a parent for his/her child and the love of a child for his/her parents. In the same way the love that is always a part of our lives must be shown to those who have least.

In hearing this Gospel we are to understand that it calls us to be centered not merely on ourselves but on others as well. Let us remember that this love which goes out to others is at the heart of who we are called to be as Catholics.

EZEKIEL

Our first reading is taken from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel prophesied to the people of the kingdom of Judah at the beginning of the sixth century before Christ. In 598 the Babylonian army sacked Jerusalem and exiled thousands of its leading citizens. Zedekiah, a brother of king Jehoiachin, was named king-regent. When he planned a rebellion against Babylonian, its army laid siege to the kingdom. The siege lasted from 589 – 586. The siege wiped out all of Judah's cities before taking Jerusalem itself. Ezekiel speaks to the exiles shortly after they have been taken into exile. Ezekiel tells the exiles that unlike the bad rulers of Israel God will be a true shepherd to his people. Unlike their king, God is a shepherd who cares for his people. Psalm 23, which we hear proclaimed, depicts God as a shepherd who cares for his flock and guides them through the dark and dangerous moments of their lives.

The scene from Ezekiel provides background for our Gospel, which is the judgment scene in the Gospel of Matthew.

JUDGMENT SCENE

Today we hear the last judgment scene from the Gospel of Matthew. When we hear this Gospel proclaimed we often hear it as a universal judgment scene. When we imagine this scene we picture all people being judged before Christ. Within the context of Matthew's Gospel this judgment scene is presented as the judgment for the Gentiles or non-Jews and non-Christians. As the Gospel is preached in the community of Matthew the understanding is that this reading answers the question, "How will non-Christians enter the kingdom?" Within the Gospel Jesus tells the Twelve that they will judge the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

In the Gospel of Matthew Christians are referred to as "little ones." Thus the "least of my brothers" refers to Christians. The Gospel says that the Gentiles will enter the kingdom if they care for the needs of ordinary Christians but especially Christian missionaries. As we hear a judgment based on feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, comforting the sick and visiting the imprisoned we are to think of Christian missionaries like Paul who suffered persecution, imprisonment and sickness for Christ. The **Gentile nations** will be judged based on how they treated the brothers and sisters of Jesus, who carry on the presence of the risen Jesus.

The judgment scene says that when Gentiles do these things for the least of my brothers you do them for me. Christ as judge says that when the Gentiles cared for one of these least ones they were caring for Him. At the end of Matthew's Gospel he indicated that he would be with his disciples to the end of the world. So when the Gentiles cared for Christians they did care for Christ.

If this judgment scene refers to the judgment of non-Christians what does it say about our lives? Does this reading not call us to be a people who care for those who suffer among us? Since this reading is true of the judgment for non-Christians it is even truer for us.

In order to understand this Gospel as referring to our judgment we must go back to the Beatitudes. In the Beatitudes Jesus says, "**Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.**" Jesus says happy are those who show mercy to others for God will show them mercy in the judgment. The judgment scene that we have heard proclaimed reminds us of the merciful works that are to be a part of our life. If we live this life of mercy God will be merciful to us.

Last weekend I went on our parish Adult Mexico Mission Trip to Saltillo, Mexico. As I spent the week in Saltillo this Gospel was on my mind. It was on my mind as we traveled to the small villages out in the desert. It was on my mind as we visited families in the barrios or poor neighborhoods in Saltillo. I couldn't help but think of this challenge to feed the hunger, clothe the naked and give water to the thirsty as we visited people who lived in one room shacks with no running water. My reflection on the Gospel and the situation in Saltillo led me to see that we didn't have to travel to Saltillo to find poverty. This poverty exists here in our own area.

The part of the trip that I would like to share with you is a message that the pastor of the Mission, Fr. Richard, shared with the group during the Mission Trip. Fr. Richard challenged the group to see the poor, to hear the poor, to share with the poor and to walk with the poor. This challenge is as important for us in this congregation as it was for those who traveled to Saltillo.

See the poor...Go to where the poor are...

Fr. Richard challenged us to go to where the poor are. He reminded us that people often don't travel to the places where the poor live. He told the story of the widow's mite to show that Jesus noticed the poor widow giving money to the Temple Treasury. Jesus went to where the poor were. We need to do the same.

Hear the poor...listen as did Jesus...

Fr. Richard then said that we need to listen to the poor. To explain this point he told the story of the Blind Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus is a blind beggar who is sitting on the side of the road. He hears Jesus coming and so he calls out to Jesus and asks Jesus to have pity on him. The reaction of the apostles is to quiet Bartimaeus down. When Jesus sees Bartimaeus he calls him over to himself. Suddenly Bartimaeus gains value in the eyes of the apostles. Jesus heals Bartimaeus.

We may be like the apostles who do not listen to the poor. Instead, we like Jesus are called to hear the poor and reach out to them in their need.

Share with the poor... The multiplication of the loaves...

Fr. Richard then spoke about the importance of sharing with the poor. We may share material goods but we at times come with empty hands and share ourselves and our faith. To make his point, Fr. Richard told the story of the multiplication of the loaves. In the story Jesus has been teaching a large crowd all day. At the end of the day, Jesus has compassion on the crowd because they are hungry and are far from the nearest village. Jesus then takes the little food that he has and shares it with the crowd. The loaves and fish are multiplied and everyone is satisfied. Just as Jesus fed the crowd, so we are called to share with the poor.

Walk with the poor...The Road to Emmaus...

Finally, Fr. Richard called us to walk with the poor. He told the story of the Road to Emmaus. Just as Jesus walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus so we are called to walk with the poor. Today's Gospel reminds us that non-Christians enter the kingdom through caring for Christ in the lives of Christians. So we are called to bring Christ to the poor in our lives. In fact in our walk with the poor Christ encounters Christ. In our lives we bring the risen Christ to the poor in whom Christ lives.

CONCLUSION

This Feast of Christ the King calls us to dedicate our entire life to Christ as our King. This Feast calls us to turn from any behavior that would turn us from Christ as our King. Just as we are to give all aspects of our life to Christ so love is to characterize our entire life. We are to live the love to which Christ calls us with our entire life, in all of our actions.

As we approach the Holiday Season, we are often are disposed to care for the poor. Let us live this Gospel not only this month but throughout the year. The Gospel reminds us that our love is not to be compartmentalized. We are to love only certain people or to love them at certain times. I am heartened when I see parishioners living out this love in their daily lives through the Saint Vincent DePaul Society, the Refuge of Hope and the Interfaith Organization and other charitable organizations.

Let us be live all live out this Gospel this Holiday Season and through the year.