

Christ the King (A)

- I love today's Gospel because it goes to the heart of the matter of our faith – it's about faith expressed, lived-out in action.
- It is often chosen by people preparing a funeral of a loved one & in that case, I normally leave out how the king deals with the goats, because presumably the reason why they choose this gospel is because their loved one has lived in the way that's characterized by those on his left hand.
- It's made me think about the Salvation Army which doesn't believe in baptism, in the Eucharist nor in the priesthood, yet you rarely hear people criticise them.
- Why? Because what they do speaks so loudly that no one cares what they believe.
- It reminds me of the saying attributed to the American writer & lecturer of the 19th century, Ralph Waldo Emerson – "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say".
- They provide soup kitchens for the starving; they clothe the naked on our streets; they rehabilitate those addicted to drugs & alcohol.
- They are there wherever disaster strikes.
- As far as **people** are concerned, **these** are the things that count.
- The Catholic Church is engaged in **all** these pastoral activities, but somehow we're more scrutinized & criticized for our teachings & especially for when our behaviour doesn't correspond to our teachings & we seem to be preaching a judgmental morality & can be rightfully considered as hypocritical.
- The Parable of the Last Judgment in today's gospel shows that these are the things that count before God as well; because in the Last Judgment no mention is made whatsoever of people's religious beliefs but only of the practical help they gave or did not give to the needy & the disadvantaged of this world.
- This parable of the Last Judgment is certainly one of the most astounding of all of the parables that Jesus told; so much so that we should strive to really understand it & celebrate it as something that is at the very heart of the Christian message.
- And one of the most astounding aspects that must strike us is that those who are welcome into the kingdom of God did not even know that they had done anything for God; they had just done the plain, ordinary, good, human thing of helping others in need by caring for them & by seeking justice for them without even necessarily thinking of God.
- They didn't do it with a so-called purity of intention - in order to please God; they didn't do it in order to gain merit; they didn't do it because of some church law or Christian obligation.
- They just did the ordinary, human, decent thing simply **because** it was the decent human thing to do; simply because there was a human need that called for a human response.
- It was all simply a matter of human beings being concerned about & helping other human beings. That's all.

- This is so astounding because there is nothing religious here, nothing 'churchy', nothing spiritual or supernatural.
- It is all just plain human & natural & earthly & secular & this worldly.
- It is all just simply ministering to the basic natural needs of human beings.
- In other words, the astounding thing that Jesus is telling us is that we will be judged only & entirely on our behavior towards other people in our ordinary, everyday, human affairs with them - out in the world.
- Could Jesus have put it any more clearly & strongly than this?
- Jesus didn't come to establish a new religion; he lived & died to show us what it means to be truly human & he was raised to life so we might be enabled to see the relevance & wonder of what it means to live truly human lives in right relationships with all people & with God.
- Jesus in the parable says quite clearly that God is to be found in secular human life in the world - even without our consciously seeking God, even without our reflectively knowing it, because whether we reflect on it or not, God is there - in those people to whom service is given or denied; & therefore our behaviour towards them is our behaviour towards God.
- This is the very crux of the whole gospel message; & this is why we need to grasp it & understand it.
- Pope Francis emphasises that the test of authenticity for a Christian is the willingness to personally bend over and touch the wounds of Christ in those who need healing and comfort.
- But if all the reality is out there in ordinary, human, natural life in the world, where we might ask, is the place for religion & church & prayers & sacraments & liturgical celebrations.
- And the answer to that is that in all these things we consciously reflect on & joyfully celebrate together that whole wonderful human reality that is already & always out there - **that** presence of God already & always out there, **that** identity of Jesus with human beings, especially those in need.
- And in celebrating it in church, we, in turn, strengthen our ability to go out & simply do it - do the ordinary human decent thing to others every time the circumstances of life make that demand on us.
- Jesus is the one who shows us & enables us to be truly human & it is by being one with him & with each other in our liturgy & through the sacraments that we have our eyes & ears opened to respond to human needs with human hearts.
- That, in reality, is religion, & that is the only true religion to which God calls us.
- Our life is on trial now - It is now that we either meet or turn away from those who suffer; It is now that we either meet or turn away from Christ.
- Our life is judged here & now.
- And I personally know that so many of you live this way – unassumingly, humbly, you put your faith into practical action, so you can be assured of God's merciful & loving judgment.