

Christ the King, Year A

GOSPEL

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Jesus said to his disciples, 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All the nations will be assembled before him and he will separate men one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right hand, 'Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.'

Then the virtuous will say to him in reply, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or see you thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?'

And the King will answer, 'I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.'

(Matthew 25:31-40)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The 'Son of Man' is a title that is often used of Jesus in the gospels. Scholars still debate the precise meaning of this title and whether Jesus used it of himself. The term, as used in the Book of Daniel, has messianic overtones; that is, it is used as a title for the Messiah.
- Service has always been at the heart of the Church's work. Traditionally, the 'corporal works of mercy' are loosely based on Jesus' words in this gospel and include feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. See *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2447.
- The Church also identifies 'spiritual works of mercy' (see CCC, §2447) as 'instructing, advising, consoling, comforting, forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently.'

EXPLORING THE WORD

Over the last few weeks, the gospel texts have dealt with issues of being prepared, staying ready, and using our gifts well. In some ways, all these themes culminate in today's text. This gospel presents us with the bottom line! Are we judged worthy of a place in the kingdom? The criteria for being judged worthy are very clear—it is how we have served those most in need. This is what will count. If we do not see Christ in our brothers and sisters in need, then our faith is blind and will not lead to the kingdom.

There is another aspect of this gospel that should not be overlooked. It is the apocalyptic vision of the Son of Man coming in glory and reigning over all the nations as King. To the King belongs the right of judgement and reward or punishment. While Matthew's community was in the 'in-between' time, the evangelist held before them the central truth that the Son of Man, the King, will come again in his glory as judge.

- During his life, Christ was not a king in a political or autocratic sense. Far from it. The subjects of his kingdom are called to service with the marginalised, the poor and the powerless.
- How does your community engage in this service? How might you and your family become involved?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What is your response to those in need? How do you practise your faith in practical ways?
- To be a shepherd in the ancient world was seen as a lowly occupation. Most often the work was done by a hired hand who felt no responsibility for the sheep. But the owner of the sheep exercised both authority and care. Jesus refers to himself as the good shepherd who knows his sheep and his sheep know him.
- Share an experience of being in need and having someone respond to that need. Did it change the way you respond to others in need?
- We may not know people who are literally hungry, thirsty, naked, sick or in prison, although billions of our brothers and sisters fall into these categories. But we all know people who are in need—emotional, financial, spiritual. This week, make a point of doing what Jesus urges in this gospel—tend to someone in need.
- Repeat this week's psalm acclamation often:

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

