

CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY, CYCLE A

Ezekiel 34: 1-2, 15-17 + Psalm 23 + 1 Cor. 15: 20-26 + Matthew 25: 31-46

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: November 23, 2014

The least, the lost, and the last are the ones with whom the King of the Universe identifies.

The hungry ones, thirsty ones, the naked and the stranger, the sick and those behind prison bars.

The Most High present in the most low. What a surprise! The King of Kings identifies with the least of his subjects, those who are at the end of the line, those who are lost in the darkness, living on the margins.

The Son of Man identifies with the least, the last, and the lost. He not only comes to find them and lift them up as Son of God, but also to live on in them.

By becoming fully human and by suffering and dying, the King of Glory has become one with all the suffering people of the world.

By emptying himself of all divine privilege to be born of the Virgin Mary, by being born in human likeness, He personally identifies himself with every form of suffering and misery.

God in Christ has abolished all distance between Himself and his beloved creatures.

The result astounds us and confounds us—in the manner that we treat one another so, too, are we treating God himself.

We look upon the other as Christ himself, loving the other as if they were Christ. Any act of kindness thus becomes an act of worship.

What Jesus reveals is that the least ones are diamonds covered in dust.

The least ones, the forgotten ones, are the temple of the King of Kings--- it's where he resides for those who have eyes of faith to see.

In this Last Judgment scene in Matthew's Gospel we are transported back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the Sermon on the Mount.

For there are echoes here of the Beatitudes from that Sermon,

Beatitudes which are Christ's mission statement in Matthew's Gospel.

Beatitudes which announce how Jesus' disciples are to live in this world, but which also describe Jesus' life.

By word and deed Jesus proclaims: blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst, blessed are the sorrowing ones, blessed are the persecuted ones.

For Jesus is born not in some regal room but in a stinky stable with the animals. He dies naked on a cross with not a penny to his name. Since the Son of Man has no place to lay his head, for Jesus is constantly on the road teaching and preaching and healing, he relies on the generous love of others for food and drink. He is a stranger to his own people--they don't know who he is and reject him. He is a prisoner on the last night of his life, held captive in a deep, dark hole in the Chief Priest's house from which there is no escape.

Thus the Beatitudes and the corporal works of mercy spelled out in this Last Judgment scene merge into the very person of Jesus, who experiences a special connection with the least ones.

We get a peek at Judgment Day in order to change the way we live today. To see the ones who live on the margins who no one else sees, and when they are seen, they are demonized as being the source of society's problems. So, we not only feed and clothe them bodily, but feed them with loving attention and clothe them with mercy, these who have been stripped naked by the judgment of others. We remember the forgotten ones, like the wounded soldier returning from war who longs for healing of body, heart, and spirit.

Salvation then looks like this---God in Christ is begging at our feet, reaching out his hand in need. How will we respond? Will we give of ourselves to the other in order to receive the Christ who comes to us, to save us, through the other? Salvation, therefore, is not something we get but something we give....

As we serve and love Christ present in the hungry and thirsty, in the naked and stranger, in those who are ill and those in prison, we begin to recognize ourselves in them. As they cry in their need for God's help, we recognize our aching need for God.

As we feed the hungry, we get in touch with our deep hunger for God. As we quench the thirst of others for the love of Christ,

we see more clearly how we long, like a deer does for running streams,
for the life giving waters of Christ's saving love.

As we clothe the naked, we recognize our own basic nakedness,
that we come into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing and
everything in-between, along the way, is a gift from God.

As we welcome the stranger,
we understand how we are all strangers in a strange land, that this earth is not
our eternal home, that all our life is a journey back home to God.

As we bring hope to those isolated by illness or isolated behind prison bars,
reminding them they are not alone, we taste the truth that we are never alone
in this life, that Christ the Good Shepherd walks with us
through all the dark valleys of our life.

The Lord Jesus, King of the Universe, comes to us in our own poverty,
in our great aching need, through the kindness and love of others who remind us
that we are never alone---that He is with us always, even unto the end of the world.

In this celebration of the Eucharist, the Risen Christ
feeds and clothes the suffering Christ in us with the great gift of hope.
So that we can love not only the suffering Christ present in the least ones out there,
but also the suffering Christ within us.
So that we might have strength to love the lost ones out there
and to love the "lost one" within our very selves.

The glorious King's self-identification with the destitute of this world
at the Final Judgment has only one parallel in the New Testament.
Namely, Jesus' self-identification with the consecrated bread and wine
at the Last Supper, as he says, "***This is my body. This is my blood.***"
So, we receive Christ's body when we receive with love
the least of our sisters and brothers.
So, we drink of his saving blood that washes us clean of sin
as we reach out to touch his bleeding body in those who suffer.

There is this unbreakable connection, indeed identification,
between Christ's Risen Body in the Eucharist
and Christ's suffering body in society's outcasts. It is the same Christ.
As He commanded us to do, we remember Him every time
we gather around this sacred table, so that we might remember He is Present in us
who are impoverished without Him and living in the least ones all around us.

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