

CHRIST THE KING – A (November 26, 2023)

On this last Sunday of the Church year, we observe the feast, the solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the universe. Last weekend I spoke about the particular judgment that we will all face at the moment of our individual death. Today's gospel, with its sobering description of the second coming of Christ at the end of time, gives us a good opportunity to think about the last or final judgment that will take place after the entire human race is raised from the dead.

The Catechism reminds us of some important truths about this event:

- no one knows when this will happen. Throughout history and in our own time, there have been those who claim to know these details...but 'Only the Father knows the day and the hour; only he determines the moment of its coming' (n. 1040).
- every detail of our lives—our thoughts and words, our actions and inaction—will all be brought to light: "the truth of each [one]'s relationship with God will be laid bare. The Last Judgment will reveal...the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life" (n. 1039).
- thus, so long as we still have the breath of life within us: "The message of the Last Judgment calls [us] to conversion" while God gives us the chance to do so (n. 1041).

We think of Jesus as Good Shepherd, Savior, healer, the One who forgives—and rightly so, for he is love, truth, and mercy. But he is also teacher who lovingly calls us to ongoing and deeper conversion. Some seem to believe that God does not judge, that he accepts me 'just the way I am' and thus conclude that I don't need to change. Whoever would say such a thing has obviously not read the gospel—especially today's passage from Matthew. We are not to judge others; Jesus is very clear about that, and only God fully knows the state of each soul. But he surely does and will judge each of us.

And how will we be judged? This familiar passage scene from Matthew lets us know rather clearly, doesn't it? "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me...what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me." This passage is at the heart of the Church's social teaching that reminds us that every person—without exception--is made in the image and likeness of God, and has a basic worth and dignity by that fact alone. From that truth comes our moral obligation to treat each person with respect and to help as we can. I'll repeat what I've told you before: no one person can meet every need, and we are not obligated to respond to every single fundraising appeal that comes our way especially at this time of year. But the fact that no one of us can do everything does not mean that we need do nothing. Jesus is clear about the fate of the 'do-nothings'—those who ignore others in their need—and that fate is not at all a pleasant one. So we do need to be responsive to the needs of others—whether the next-door neighbor or the neighbor halfway around the world. I suggest praying for guidance to know what God wants of you here—who he wants you to help, and how.

But there is one particular arena in which Jesus' words today have a special relevance, and that is in our own family relationships. Do we remember that Jesus is to be seen in each member of our family just as much as he is found in the poor, the hungry and thirsty, the naked, or the imprisoned?

--parents: when the kids are acting up for the umpteenth time today and your nerves are at the breaking point, what do you do? Do you allow yourself to explode...or do you pause, count to ten (or twenty or more), do you pray and plead for the grace of God, and then speak to the kids at least a little more calmly and make the conscious effort to see the Jesus who is truly in them...even if all appearances are to the contrary?? "Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me."

--children/young people: when Mom and Dad are getting after you to clean up your room, to not spend so much time on social media, or when your brother or sister keep doing that one thing that they know bugs you no end, what do you do? Do you strike back, yell or mouth off at them...or do you pause, take a moment to remember that Mom and Dad really love you and want the best for you? And that your siblings are loved and important members of the family just as much as you are (even if you don't always like them a whole lot)?? Do you remember that Jesus really is in Mom, Dad, brother, sister? "Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me."

--spouses: when the same arguments come up (money, in-laws, whatever else), what do you do? Do you let the tempers flare up and let loose with the put-downs, insults and sarcasm? Do you bring up past hurts yet again or give each other the silent treatment that can be so deadly in a marriage...or do you pause, make the conscious effort to remember that God joined you of your own free will in your marriage sacrament and promised all the help and grace you would need to handle those inevitable challenges that come up? Do you remember that what you do for or to each other as husband and wife, you actually do for or to Jesus himself? "Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me."

This approach works in all our relationships—at work or school, in the slow-moving checkout line or in busy traffic, as you think or talk about certain public officials or celebrities. We will indeed be judged by Christ the King, and that judgment will be based in large part on how well or how poorly we treat Jesus who is in every single person without exception. Let's remember this daily; let's see how often we fall short in this regard, and then pray for the grace we need to do better. "Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me...what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me." Jesus was very clear about the consequences of our actions or inactions. You know, he really did mean what he said.