

A Different Kind of Kingdom

November 22, 2020, Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Gospel of Matthew 25:31-46

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When I ponder the significance of the Feast of Christ the King, I don't initially think of a king but rather the state of the kingdom, realm or domain over which that king presides. That will tell us much about the qualities of the king. These days we might relate it more to a CEO and his or her relationship to the employees and customers of their company.

Our biblical reading from the prophet Ezekiel speaks in terms of the relationship of a true shepherd with his flock. It tells of one who places priority on the lost and the most vulnerable of his sheep.

Similarly, the gospel today outlines the same qualities of compassion and outreach of those destined to share in the Kingdom of God.

It is to be noted that those chosen for the Kingdom were not necessarily those who professed faith in the 'right' set of doctrines or who practised certain prescribed practices of piety or even those who had achieved high positions of religious authority. Rather, the criteria for entrance into the Kingdom boiled down to simple acts of compassion and charity shown towards one's fellow human beings.

This is not to say that organized religion of any kind is not necessary. In fact it is very necessary if it awakens us and leads us to actively respond to Jesus' invitation to make the fragile and the vulnerable a priority in our life's journey.

These are the things that every person is capable of doing no matter how rich or poor; no matter what social status they have; no matter what faith, creed or ideology they may follow.

In former eras, a great deal of stock was put into whether people were the 'right' religion or not. It set the stage for a kind of tribalism that pitted people against each other. We forgot about Jesus' words, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven - but rather those who DO the will of my Father'.

This message was quite clear and consistent throughout Jesus' public ministry.

In some ways it is rather unfortunate that we have to use earthly authoritarian titles for Jesus because earthly rulers, whether they be kings, emperors, presidents etc. have, more often than not, abused their power and have only looked after their own self interests. Furthermore, it would be rather self-righteous not to think that each of us have done the same.

As we draw closer to the end of the calendar year 2020 and the challenges that it has brought and will continue to bring, it might be beneficial to reflect on Jesus' parable about the sheep and the goats and the Last Judgment. It laid down the foundation of what we came to call the Temporal Works of Mercy [Feeding the Hungry; Giving Drink

to the Thirsty, Clothing the Naked; Sheltering the Homeless, Visiting the Sick and the Imprisoned; Burying the Dead]. We might also recall from our catechism days that these were coupled with the Spiritual Works of Mercy [Instructing the Ignorant; Counselling the Doubtful; Admonishing Sinners; Bearing those who wrong us patiently; Forgiving Offences; Comforting the Afflicted; Praying for the Living and the Dead].

Jesus combined both the Spiritual and the Temporal Works in his own life and bids us to do the same in building his Kingdom.

Perhaps it might be well for all of us to reacquaint ourselves with them [you can look them up on Google] and see what opportunities they may bring to us during this very unusual year, keeping in mind Jesus' words: 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me'.