

Matthew 25:31-46^{vi vii}

Jesus said to the disciples: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

^{vi} **About Matthew 25:31-46**

Today's reading, the last of Matthew's three end-time parables, is more a vision of the last judgment than it is a parable. Here the Son of Man, Jesus' title for himself, is clearly identified as the King and Judge of all people, roles traditionally attributed exclusively to God.

The King offers only one criterion of judgment: deeds of compassion. Verses 35-45 list six representative good works, five of which are found in standard Jewish lists. The sixth service, visiting prisoners, was an issue of concern for the early Church.

Here is Jesus' unmistakable revelation of God's true nature. As Son of Man, Jesus associates himself not with the brilliant, the pious, the famous or the powerful, but with the least—the hungry, thirsty, lonely, sick, naked and imprisoned. Jesus clearly delineates the values of the kingdom of heaven. Those who suffer are close to the heart of God. Those who minister to the suffering receive the Father's blessing. Good intentions are insufficient; what counts are actions, not words.

^{vii} **Reflection and Response**

Someone unfamiliar with today's gospel might see the heading—Feast of Christ the King—and expect to read about trumpets and glory. At the very least, one could expect a crown, a touch of ermine.

The portrait Matthew paints undermines that expectation. This King is not concerned with his own aggrandizement or glorification. This King looks instead to the hungry, the thirsty, those whose most basic human needs have not been satisfied.

Then the King unveils his true identity. "If you want to see me," he says, "look for me in them." If we think about it, those values are right on the mark. If we look at those whom Jesus describes, we find surprising evidence of royal behavior.

One mother tells of taking her daughter's class to participate in a project with children from the poorest neighborhoods of San Diego. When lunch time arrived, the wealthy children pulled out deli sandwiches and expensive drinks. One poor child kept her lunch in her brown bag. The mother, afraid that the girl didn't have enough to eat, sat beside her and asked gently, "Do you have corn chips? You're lucky! Those are my favorite!" With that encouragement, the child proudly emptied out the whole bag of chips—all she had—to share them with the mother. Who then was most queenly?

As Paul writes, “all will be made alive in Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Yes, even the selfish and the wealthy can enter into Christ’s reign. But we must look to unlikely leaders, and follow the vulnerable, poor ones who show us the path to service, selflessness and authenticity.