

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THE KING A/2005

At the end of every liturgical year and at the beginning of another, we are used celebrating the feast of Christ the King. But what do we mean when we say that Christ is the king? What are the main characteristics of this kingdom and its scope? How can man belong to it? Today's readings try to answer these questions by showing us what is truly Christ's kingdom.

As a matter of fact, Jesus' kingdom does mean a portion of land on which Christ reigns or a political empire belonging to Christ. It is first of all a state of things in which everything is submitted to God and Christ. Christ's kingdom means the victory of Christ over death, which has been realized in his resurrection from the dead. When, in the 2nd reading, St Paul says that Christ "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet", he speaks of the forces of evil that dominate, causing pain and suffering, and destroying a person. When all these powers of evil are destroyed, then the Kingdom of God will be fully attained. If so, how can we say that in his resurrection Christ overcame death? He has overcome death because he has deprived it of its meaning of total destruction for human beings and has transformed it into a new birth leading into a definitive and complete life. He was the first to pass through this way and all those who die with him will also join him in the life of God.

In this perspective, Christ is the leader of a new humanity and a new world in which there will be no more death. Consequently, he gives life and leads those who belong to him to more abundant life. That is why the first reading recalls this good shepherd who leads the sheep and watches over them with solicitude and care. The image of the shepherd evoked in this text reminds us of Christ who accepted death not only for the Jewish people, but also to bring together into one body all the scattered people of God (John 11, 52). The role of Christ becomes more clear again when we understand that he has been sent by the Father so that whoever believes in him may not die, but has eternal life. Therefore, leading the flock on behalf of his Father, Christ pastures each of them and gives them rest. Then he seeks the lost sheep and brings it back, the injured, he heals.

If the Lord is so benevolent toward us, it means that, in return, we should do the same toward one another. It is here we find the point of today's Gospel and the reason why we will be judged according to our loving and compassionate attitude toward one another. Let me tell you from the outset that today's Gospel affirms very clearly that the love of God and the love of neighbor are one, because what is done to a human person is done to God. Whoever loves people, loves God and one cannot love God without loving people. Any religion that does not lead people to love their brothers and sisters is false and has nothing to do with Christianity. In other words, the love we have for a brother or a sister is the measure of our love for God. Whoever does not pledge himself to construct a better world, whoever does not strive to remove whatever harms his fellow mankind, whoever does not

cooperate in the construction of Jesus' Kingdom, has no right to be called Christian.

In this perspective, the scenario of judgment aims to teach us that very Christian value, namely the fraternal love which is the criterion of our belonging to the Kingdom of Christ. Are not Christians recognized by their love for one another, said Jesus? If we fail to live in solidarity with one another, if we live selfishly we condemn ourselves and put ourselves outside God's Kingdom. Moreover, it is important not to consider the words of Jesus as a literal description of what will happen at the end of the world. It is simply a way of telling us what we should do today if we do not want to lose our life. It is a dramatic denunciation of what should not be done if one wants to avoid ruining one's life. The Lord is simply pointing out what is wrong, where the mistake is, because he wants it to be avoided. In other words, we should not be asking ourselves "who will be considered a sheep and who a goat at the end of the world"? On the contrary, the problem is to find out who today is a sheep and who is a goat. When we love our fellows, we are like sheep, and when we behave selfishly, we are like goats.

Another fact I would like to point out is that those who have been helpful to their fellow mankind and those who were not are surprised to hear the Master telling them that they did, or did not, help him. This shows us that Christians should strive to recognize Christ in others; because Christ is hidden in the image of our fellowmen and the needy we meet along our way. In other words, Christ does not condemn anybody, but each one condemns himself by his lack of openness to the needy and to his brothers and sisters.

Let me finish by saying this: when the readings speak of separating the sheep from the goats, it is a distinction which is done by God who uses only one criterion: the love of mankind. The life of a person is considered a success or a failure on the basis of what was done by that person to alleviate six situations of suffering and poverty: hunger, thirst, exile, nakedness, disease, prison. In this context, our religion is summed up in the diligence and zeal with which we fight against these inhuman situations. If we do not seriously live according to the law of love, we run the risk of being left outside God's kingdom. Let us pray that the Father may help us to live according to his law of love for one another and to recognize his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the needy, the sick and the abandoned. May God bless you all.



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