

Christ the King A/2008

If the question was asked of American people to tell the difference between a Kingdom and a Republic, everyone would certainly come with a prompt and quick answer. The events leading to the Declaration of Independence have instructed the people a lot on this matter. A kingdom as well as a Republic has, each, its own principles and rules of governance. What all this comes to mean is that, more than the form of the government, the way of governing a people matters; the pursuit of their wellbeing and their welfare is equally important.

Most of the time when those in power forget to care for the common good and to pursue the wellbeing of the people, it often ends up with the change of the direction of the country and the search for a new leadership. That was true in the past as it is true today. All the readings on this feast of Christ the King focus on the quality of leadership and invite us to welcome Jesus as the king of our lives.

The first reading of the book of Ezekiel is an oracle against the bad leaders. In this prophecy, God compares Israel to a flock of sheep, neglected, preyed upon and dispersed by bad shepherds. Because the shepherds have failed in their duty, God himself comes in order to rescue the sheep. He will take over the shepherds' responsibilities and will be the good shepherd, tending the sheep, rescuing the scattered of the flock, bringing them to rest in good pastures where the lost will be sought out and those who stray brought back. In the same way, he will take care of the injured sheep and heal the sick ones. But those among the sheep who are disturbed, he will remove from the flock.

This prophecy of Ezekiel prefigures Christ, the good shepherd who gives his life for our sake. Christ took flesh and became a human being so that by sharing in our humanity, we too could share in his divinity. He lived the whole of his life in solidarity with us until death on the cross. Since Christ died and rose for our sake, we share also in his resurrection. As we have been in solidarity with Adam, the first man, from whom death came into the world, so we are in solidarity with the risen Christ from whom God brought back life to us. That is the testimony St Paul gives in the second reading.

St Paul tells us that Jesus reigns as king until he will come again at the second coming. His kingship was inaugurated in his resurrection. He must reign until the last enemy, which is death, is destroyed. Then, he will hand to the Father everything so that God may be all in all. From that moment on, the sovereignty of God and Christ will be absolute; they will have no enemies, no rivals, no combat. Everything will be fulfilled as Christ reigns forever at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

This testimony of St Paul helps us understand the quintessence of the kingdom of Jesus. Christ is our true leader and our King. But, his kingdom is not of this world or like those of this world. His Kingdom is a kingdom of humble service and love. Consequently, those who belong to him should become in the midst of the world his hands and his eyes, his mouth and his ears. They should always act toward their brothers and sisters, animated and guided by the law of love at the example of Christ himself. That is why the building of Jesus' kingdom in this

world is made through our service to our brothers and sisters and through the deeds of love to others.

This point is absolutely crucial; it constitutes the criterion for our last judgment at the end of time, as today's Gospel relates. Today's parable reminds us that we cannot only care for our spirituality, our individual devotion, our personal holiness and salvation. We should care also for the needs of our brothers and sisters. Of course, we should do all the spiritual exercises and fulfill our devotions, but always with the idea in mind that these should not be separated from the works of charity toward our fellow humans.

That is why we will be judged, not only according to our personal spirituality, but also in accordance with our reaction to human needs. God's judgment will not depend on the knowledge we would have about him or the teachings of the Church, but on how we have been sensitive to the needy and on how much help we have given.

We learn also from the parable that what is required of us is not great things, but small gestures of friendship and solidarity, like giving a meal to a hungry person or a cup of water to a thirsty person, welcoming a stranger, visiting a sick person or a prisoner, clothing a naked person, etc. These are simple things we cannot help doing; they have an eternal price.

However, our help should be without calculation and must flow from a loving heart. In fact, the help that wins the heart of God is that which is given for nothing, that is, which is done just for the sake of helping someone in need. Those who helped people in need did not think at all they were helping Christ, and yet they were accumulating their eternal reward. Those who withheld the help to their fellow beings did not think, either, that they were closing their heart to Jesus. In the end, they were full of regret and remorse: if we just knew it was you...

All this teaches us that Jesus is hidden in our fellow humans. Jesus confronts us with the truth of his hidden presence. Anytime we give help to someone in need, we give it to Jesus. Anytime we withhold help toward the needy, it is against Christ.

In other words, as Christians, we are the hands of God, his eyes, his ears, his mouth and his heart. God reaches out to his children through us. It is our duty to serve our fellow humans as Christ has served us until death. Because the kingdom of Christ is that of love and service, let us serve him by serving our fellow humans. Because Christ is our king, let us submit ourselves to him so that he reigns in our minds, in our hearts and in our bodies, and transforms us in his image. God bless you all and have a blessed celebration!

Ezekiel 34, 11-12, 15-17; 1 Corinthians 15, 20-26, 28; Matthew 25, 31-46



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