

Christ the King Sunday A/2017

The readings of this Solemnity talk about the kingship of Jesus. They show that, like a shepherd, Jesus is a king who cares for the spiritual welfare of his sheep. They invite us to entrust our lives to the leadership of Jesus and to submit ourselves to the rules of his kingdom.

The first reading of the book of Ezekiel describes the care of God for the children of Israel. It uses the image of the shepherd in order to explain how God takes care of his people. It shows in particular how God will look after his sheep, rescuing those strayed, healing those injured and feeding those in need.

What is behind this text is the idea that God's leadership is better than human leadership. There is also the idea that where human leadership falls short, God takes things in hand for the wellbeing of his own. The last idea is relative to the truth that God is the guarantor of the health of his people.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus speaks of the last judgment. The Gospel starts with Jesus speaking to his disciples about the imminent coming of the Son of Man and the gathering of all the nations before him. It reports on what will happen when the Son of Man will separate the sheep from the goats, placing the first at his right and the last at his left.

After that, the Gospel reports on the blessed fate of those on the right of the Lamb who will inherit the kingdom and the sad fate of those on the left who will be punished. The Gospel gives equally the criteria that will be decisive in determining the fate of those groups by referring to charity and compassion. The gospel ends up by recalling the contrasted fate of the righteous and the wicked.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today, I want to talk about the kingship of Jesus. First of all, let me start with some remarks. First: In the Ancient world, the only form of government known and practiced by people was monarchy. In that context, people talked very easily about empires and kingdoms.

Moreover, according to that conception, any power came directly from God and was guaranteed by him, giving rise to the leadership of one family over the whole country. Second: What today we call democracy is a very recent form of government that privileges the leadership of the people by the people and which has emerged in history following the Greek thinking. The global goal of those governments is the social wellbeing of the people.

Those remarks are important because when we talk about the kingship of Jesus, it is not first of all about the social welfare of the people, but rather their spiritual good so that it aims at helping people to know God and come to their eternal salvation. That is why Jesus is not a king like those of this world. He is a king *sui generis*. When at the passion Pilate asked him if he was a king, Jesus recognized that it was true, but he immediately said that his kingdom was not of this world.

In that sense, when we say that Jesus is king, it is not according to the criteria of this world where the sovereigns have a territory on which they reign, an army that protects them and people on whom they reign. His kingdom is of another order and responds to other criteria and rules.

According to today's Gospel, the building of Jesus' kingdom is made possible through the works of charity toward the needy. Charity is the criteria of the building of the kingdom of Jesus. That is why anytime we do good to others because of our faith, we build Jesus' kingdom and declare our belonging to his kingdom. Anytime we forget to practice charity, to care for the needy and the poor, to pay attention to the vulnerable, we run the risk of being left out of the kingdom.

I believe that is the reason why the righteous at the right side of the Son of Man were surprised. They did not do anything extraordinary in their life than to help their fellows in need. And yet, by doing so, they were taking care of Jesus. In the same way, the others who are rejected are also surprised to learn that they did not do anything for Jesus. And yet, they did not see Jesus and refused to help.

Given all that, we have to understand that Jesus is hidden in our fellows. Where the needs of our fellows are recognized, Jesus is acknowledged and his kingdom is in the making. When the hungry are fed, the thirsty offered a cup of water, strangers offered hospitality, the naked covered with dignity, the sick and the prisoners visited, the Kingdom of Jesus is in the making. In that sense, our problem today is that of decoding the image of Jesus hidden in the needy, because anytime we help someone in need, it is Jesus we care for. Anytime, we withhold our help toward a needy person, it is against Jesus.

Therefore, the Gospel challenges us to see the broken body of Christ in the brokenness of those we see around us. The Gospel does not require of us spectacular actions, but simple gestures of gentleness, friendship, attention, generosity, compassion and openness toward the needy and the vulnerable. Those actions are simply human, but they have a religious prize, namely a sharing in the kingdom of Jesus.

As disciples of Jesus, we have to become in the world his hands, his eyes, his ears, his mouth and his heart. Jesus reaches out to the poor and needy through us. It is our duty and our mission to serve Jesus by serving our fellows in need.

Of course, Jesus is king, but not in the sense of forcing us to obey him. He leaves us free to accept him or not, to share his vision of things or not. However, if we cooperate and follow his rules, we build his kingdom among us, because we build our eternal future with him.

In that sense, the dream of our life takes place here and now, because it is now that we are still here on earth that we can do something for our eternal salvation. This time we have is an opportunity God gives us to build his kingdom by submitting ourselves to his rules.

Let us, pray, then, that the Lord may help us to build his kingdom by taking care of the vulnerable among us at the example of Jesus Christ the King. God bless you all!

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

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