

34th Sunday

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Jesus said to his disciples:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory,
and all the angels with him,
he will sit upon his glorious throne,
and all the nations will be assembled before him.
And he will separate them one from another,
as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.
Then the king will say to those on his right,
'Come, you who 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 drink,
a stranger and you welcomed me,
naked and you clothed me,
ill and you cared for me,
in prison and you visited me.'
Then the righteous will answer him and say,
'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you,
or thirsty and give you drink?
When did we see you a stranger and welcome you,
or naked and clothe you?
When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'
And the king will say to them in reply,
'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did
for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.'
Then he will say to those on his left,
'Depart from me, you accursed,
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 no drink,
a stranger and you gave me no welcome,
naked and you gave me no clothing,
ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.'
Then they will answer and say,
'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty
or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison,
and not minister to your needs?'
He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you,
what you did not do for one of these least ones,
you did not do for me.'
And these will go off to eternal punishment,
but the righteous to eternal life."

Mt 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him."

Majestic, magnificent vision of the all-visible glory of God. A complete triumph.

Have you ever seen a triumph like this? Have you even heard or read anything that would look like this triumph that did not end badly? What is it? Is it some early Christian attempt of self-deception in order to help survive difficult times of Roman oppression? Is the universal popularity of this image simply connected with the fact that we never seem to be winning, and we are trying to keep our spirits up? In the time of the pandemic that threatens us with unknown consequences, in the time of visible corruption and confusion among many highly positioned men in the Church, is this something that we should be even reading? Is it still spiritually healthy or have we already crossed the line of self-deception?

When the world is throwing at Jesus a barrage of its own nagging and painful questions, he leads us somewhere beyond. His words sound so much beyond time and beyond human imagination. They are so vivid and powerful, that we know he wants to abolish the final distance of misconception and misunderstanding. He wants to meet us face to face.

This is the point of the story: closeness of God. Jesus describes what the ultimate encounter with him will look like. He will come and we will recognize him. Everybody who ever lived in any time and space will be standing there, looking at him. He will separate those who loved and those who didn't by the simple truth of his divinity. There will be no misunderstandings, no misjudgments, just a peaceful recognition: in the presence of God everything becomes clear.

How could there be any questions after this judgement? How could it be that neither the good nor the evil ones remember their meetings with the same Lord and King? If God were a king of this world, certainly everyone would remember every meeting with him and would have a photo to prove it. But Christ is not the king of this world. He is not a self-obsessed despot who makes sure that everyone bows to him, who enforces his own majesty on the whole world, who is so full of himself and his power that there is no space or air in the room for anyone to exist around him. He is not a destroyer of nations. He is not a conqueror of empires.

He is a different kind of king. In his kingdom, the highest revelation of majesty happens on the cross. The deepest humiliation of the human person, becomes his crown jewel. He is betrayed, alone, rejected, and abandoned; hungry, thirsty and suffering. Utterly and profoundly alone in this world.

When he put on himself all those attributes of human misery he not only defeated them by the brightness of his holiness; he also made out of them a space for our love. The King of Glory, who is Love himself, when he became the pain and the thirst and the

hunger of the world, intimately encountered us in every aspect of our being. When he did that, he transformed everything. He met us, both as the one who gives himself so that we are able to love, and as the one who receives this love so that we have someone to love. He united himself with the thirsty, the hungry, and the naked and through that, he made even the most shaming aspects of human existence the place of redemption. He did so out of love; the perfect gift out of his endless, divine freedom.

The newness of His love makes it so the nations gathered in front of him don't remember their first encounter with the King. For them, it was just human misery. For this same reason, the judgment they received is so profound, subtle, and perfect. It is undisputed, because it is their own love, given by Jesus and accepted or rejected by them, that becomes the source and revelation of this judgment.

Jesus, the King of the Universe, reveals and offers to us the ultimate dignity and majesty: the nobility of the Creator, the purity of the Redeemer, and the delicate intense fire of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

This is no psychological illusion repeated through the ages. This is no opium of the masses. This is no outdated leftover of some compromised social system.

This is the King of Glory, Jesus Christ, who looks with love into my eyes and invites me to follow him on his way to meet the Father.