

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THE KING 2020

November 22, 2020 - Fr. Clem Davis

Ezek 34:11-12, 15-17 *Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will look after and tend my sheep...
The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick
I will heal....*

Ps 23:1 *The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.*

1Cor 15:20-26, 28 *...in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ
the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ....*

Mt 25:31-46 *...whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me...what
you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.*

True confession: Just this week I went to Confession, the first confession I've made in months! It had been bothering me for some time now, even though it had been "off my radar" during those months I was confined at Four Seasons due to the pandemic. But since July I've known it was a priority to get to Confession, because that's what a priest is supposed to do. While I wasn't aware of any mortal sins, I knew that this long absence was a sign of poor stewardship of my priesthood. Monday my Priest Support Group was scheduled to meet, so I would pull one of my brothers aside and "get it done." Completely forgetting that we had cancelled our gathering in a text exchange three days earlier, I drove out to Paul's cabin and was surprised to find only one car there. Yes, I was a few minutes late! Paul was there to mark his day off, and it seemed like God had "cleared the decks" just for me. It was a prayerful and uplifting experience to celebrate the sacrament with him, and he immediately asked that I hear his confession too. Thanks be to God, who cares for sheep and shepherds!

What was reinforced for me in this experience was that God is always there, always ready to receive us, in our need, in our joys and sorrows, in our sin and in our repentance. We need to take the time and make the effort to recognize him as there for us in every moment, not just in church, and not just on special occasions, or certain seasons of the Church Year. More than that, God wants us to recognize that we are not our own. We are not running the race of life in competition with one another, with God waiting at the Finish Line with First, Second, and Third Prize medals!

Today's scriptures remind us that God is near, God is here, God is with us in the struggles and the triumphs, in our loneliness and in reunions, in our highs and lows. And God is never less than a Loving Presence in all those encounters. BUT, God is especially present in those who are least able to repay any kindness shown them. Today's Gospel makes clear that God is in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the ill, the imprisoned. Whatever we do for or fail to do for any of these, we have done or have failed to do for God. How often do I, do we, include our interactions with these folks, or the absence of these interactions, in our examination of conscience?

If we want our relationship with God to become more than transactional, more than just keeping the rules, then we must be looking for God in all the right places. God is to be found in the sacraments, surely, but that poses a real challenge during this pandemic. Social distancing requires that we NOT fill our churches. Does that mean we can "take a break" from really living our faith? Won't God understand that we have to put our faith life "on hold" until conditions improve and we can get back to our regular attendance at Sunday Mass? Today's Gospel never mentions congregational worship, does it? But Christ our King lays out how we enter into true communion with the heart of God, and it is by lovingly caring for those most in need: feeding the

hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned.

We learned these activities as the CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY. To the six measures of love in today's Gospel the Church added a seventh, burying the dead. As children we probably saw this as a kind of checklist to be satisfied. If we kept this list in mind into our adult years, we may have examined ourselves like this: "Gave five dollars to the missions. Said hi to that homeless guy. Brought old clothes to the Salvation Army. Visited Aunt Bertha at the nursing home, sent a card to incarcerated Uncle Ray, and went to cousin Pete's funeral. Done!" But we are called to a relationship with God who makes his home with the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the sick and imprisoned, the immigrant and asylum seeker. "The farther we journey into them, the more deeply we come into communion with the heart of God."

We are called to be more creative in imagining how hunger and thirst manifest themselves in our world today. "Feeding the hungry may mean listening to someone to whom no one listens. Giving drink to the thirsty may include offering kind words of praise to those who rarely hear anything positive. Welcoming the stranger often involves countering prejudice with an openness to all God's children, no matter how different or fearful they may seem. Clothing the naked is also a summons to work for justice so that no one is homeless, unprotected, or denied basic human dignity. Visiting the sick isn't only necessary when someone has broken an arm – it can also be an invitation to relationship with a family member who has lost his or her way. The imprisoned aren't only in jail—they are the isolated members of our society who can't get out of their houses or their poverty or their destructive family patterns or their despair. Burying the dead also implies letting go of the past, its injuries and injustices, and allowing forgiveness to bring healing and wholeness to us and our adversaries.

"If we want God's mercy, we have to become God's mercy. It's a very simple formula, and now is the right time to take up the practice." Remember, Our Lord Jesus Christ is King!

(Quotations from Alice Camille in *Exploring the Word*, in PREPARE the WORD, a monthly online commentary on Sunday scriptures.)