

An EXEGESIS—EA52
November 22, 2020
The Feast of Christ the King

For Faith Sharing—Gospel: [Matthew 25:31-46](#)

Theme: Jesus' kingdom is one of actions & deeds, not merely of words.

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."

SCRIPTURAL NOTE: This is one of the most vivid parables Jesus ever spoke, and the lesson is crystal clear—that **God will judge us in accordance with our response to human need.** His judgment does not depend on how much knowledge we have amassed, or the fame that we have acquired, or the fortune we have gained, **but on the how we treat others and the help that we have given to others in need.** [William Barclay, Matthew, 325]

1. **Question:** What kind of help does Jesus say we must give to others?
2. **Question:** What should characterize the help that we offer others?
3. **Question:** What does Jesus mean when he says giving help to these least ones is really helping me?
4. **Question:** What can you do (alone or with others) to help those without food, shelter or other needs.
5. **Question:** How did Saint Sister Theresa of Calcutta respond to today's Gospel?
6. **Question:** What so compels a response from us of a God who stoops?
7. **Question:** Why do the people Jesus cites here need our active loving kindness?

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Q1. It must be help in simple things. The things that Jesus picks out—giving a hungry man a meal, or a thirsty man a drink, welcoming a stranger, cheering the sick, visiting the prisoner—are things which anyone can do. It is not a question of giving away thousands of dollars, or of writing our names in the annals of history; it is **the case of giving simple help to the people we meet every day.** [Barclay, Matthew, 325]

Q2. It must be help which is uncalculating. Those who helped do not think that they were helping Christ and thus piling up eternal merit; they helped because they could not stop themselves. **It was the natural, instinctive, quite uncalculating response of a loving heart.** Whereas on the other hand the attitude of those who failed to help was, **“If I had known it was you,** we would gladly have helped; but we thought it was only some common man who was not worth helping.” It is still true that there are those who will help if they are given praise and thanks and publicity; but to help like that is not to help, it is to pander to self-esteem. Such help is not generosity; it is disguised selfishness. The help which wins the approval of God is that which is given for nothing but for the sake of helping. [Barclay, Matt, 325]

Q3. Jesus confronts us with the wonderful truth that all such help given is given to himself, and all such help withheld is withheld from himself. How can that be? If we really wish to delight a parent’s heart, if we really wish to move him/her to gratitude, the best way to do it is to help his/her child. God is the great Father; and the way to delight the heart of God is to help his children, our fellow men and women. [Barclay, Matthew, 326]

Q4. The corporal & spiritual works of mercy are:

- | <u>Corporal works</u> | <u>Spiritual works</u> |
|--|--|
| • To feed the hungry; | to instruct the ignorant |
| • to give drink to the thirsty; | to counsel the doubtful |
| • to clothe the naked; | to admonish sinners |
| • to shelter the homeless; | to bear wrongs patiently |
| • to visit the sick; | to forgive offenses |
| • to visit the imprisoned; | to comfort the afflicted |
| • to bury the dead. | to pray for the living & the dead |

Q5. People often asked Mother Teresa why she loved the poor so much, how she could honor dignity in such difficult situations. In response, she liked to grasp their hand, slowly wiggle one finger at a time, and explain: **“You-did-it-to-me.”** In her mind, you could count the whole Gospel on just five fingers.

She was alluding to Matthew 25 where Jesus teaches about the final judgment. Our Lord explains that at the end of the world **he will judge people by their deeds of mercy.** To the kind and giving, he will say, “Come you who are blessed by my Father...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.” But his surprised listeners ask, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink?” Jesus replies, **“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”**

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For Mother Teresa, **this passage wasn't just a pious metaphor. It described reality.** The secret to her infectious joy and boundless compassion was that in every person—every paralytic, every leper, every invalid, and every orphan—she recognized Jesus.

A Hindu gentleman once approached Mother Teresa and pointed out that while both he and Mother were doing social work, the difference was that he and his coworkers were **doing it for something** while Mother Teresa was **doing it for someone**. The compassionate nun didn't help people simply because "it was the right thing to do." She helped them because she knew, deep in her bones, that **by serving others she was serving Jesus himself**.

Like all Christians, Mother Teresa found strength and sustenance through prayer. **It brought her close to Christ and helped her know him in a personal way.** But she valued her favorite form of prayer—the Mass—for another reason: **it helped her recognize Christ in others.** [<https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/blog/jesus-in-his-most-distressing-disguise/4479/>]

Q6. Reverend Fleming Rutledge shared these thoughts about today's gospel. "The star of **Diana, princess of Wales**, has faded since her funeral -- a funeral that was watched by 2 billion people. Still, in all the hundreds of hours of television and the thousands of words written, I never heard anyone specifically identify the factor that I believe accounts for much of the extraordinary public outpouring. The various talking heads spoke of her beauty, accessibility, modernity, vulnerability, compassion and common touch -- **but no one identified the combination that made Diana exceptional.** Many famous people have engaged in charitable activities. Many have elicited near fanatical devotion because of their beauty talent, personal chemistry, or skill in creating a media image. None of them, however, were able to combine in one person what Diana did.

In the princess of Wales, majesty stooped. That was the key to her power. What Diana symbolized was this: **she was seen as one who was willing to lay aside princely prerogatives to be with those who are downtrodden, with readiness to be with those who have no status in the world.**

Many who saw the video of her visit to Angola would agree that Diana's ability to communicate her concern for the wretched of the earth took the breath away. I read the testimony of an American physician who had accompanied her on hospital rounds **where there were no cameras.** He said she did not hesitate to caress and linger beside patients with disfigurements and symptoms that were distressing even to medical personnel. **That capacity the doctor emphasized, cannot be faked.** When it is offered generously and unstintingly by a beautiful young woman who is the embodiment of everyone's image of a fairy princess, the impact is astonishing. My point has to do with the power of symbols. Diana **knew how to use her immense candlepower for the good of the ordinary people. This is the right use of royalty.**

These thoughts are meant to suggest that the feast day of Christ the King presents us with an extraordinary opportunity. We were speaking of archetypes; something greater than archetypes is here. We were speaking of the strength of symbolism; something stronger than symbolism is here. **If it is true that there is unique power in the combination of royalty and stooping, then there has never been anything comparable to the errand of**

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the Son of God. In Jesus Christ we see the one "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be clutched at, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil. 2:6).

The problem with much of our Christology nowadays is that we have concentrated so much on the stooping that we have lost sight of the royalty. More than half of the biblical message is thereby eliminated, **for it is the combination that counts.** Thus we read in Exodus 3, "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, 'I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them.'"

The God so terrible that we must hide our faces from his resplendence **is the same God who has come down to deliver his people in their extremity.** That is the secret. The Son who "sits upon his glorious throne with all the nations gathered before him" (Matt. 25:31-2) **is the same one who, at the very apex of his cosmic power,** reveals that the universe turns upon a cup of water given to the littlest ones in his name. An outpouring of the love of our hearts toward this king will therefore transcend the merely neurotic. **Acts of mercy toward his little ones are vindicated already in the court of heaven, because they are taken up into the divine life of the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us.** [Fleming Rutledge, Royalty Stoops at <https://www.religion-online.org/article/royalty-stoops-matt-2531-46/>]

Q7. Notice this about the Gospel judgment scene:

- (1) none of the things Jesus mentions are religious in nature;
- (2) there is no mention whatever of any commandments being observed or violated;
- (3) people are condemned not for doing morally wrong actions, **but for doing nothing at all;**
- (4) the actions **are done (or not done) TO Jesus** and not just FOR Jesus. **In other words, Jesus is truly present in every person I meet.** I am not just nice to this person (whom I may not care about very much) in order to do a "good act" which Jesus will reward and add to my bank account of "good works". People cannot be used, even for spiritual purposes.

To sum up, Jesus is saying that, if I wish to be counted among the sheep, then, **I must be an actively loving person, irrespective of the response I get to my love. This is the way God loves me.** It is not enough just to fulfill obligations, religious or otherwise. It won't do to say, "I am a good enough Catholic". **I am expected to keep going out of my way and reach out in love especially to those in need** - the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the poor and naked, the sick, those in prison or imprisoned in nursing homes. It does not matter how they got sick (acquiring AIDS through a sexually promiscuous lifestyle, overindulgence in alcohol or nicotine) or why they are in prison (murder, rape of a young girl, terrorism...). **These people are especially to be loved because they are the most in need of having their lives turned round.**

This is the King I am called to serve. The picture of the Judgment in the Gospel is **a challenge not about the future, but about today. The surest way to guarantee that I will be numbered among the sheep is for me to become right now a loving, caring, tolerant, accepting person.** Help me, Lord, to seek and find and respond to you in every person and in every experience of this day. [Frank Doyle, SJ at sacredspace.ie, living space/]