

Sunday, November 20, 2011 – Feast of Christ The King

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

“The Profile of a King”

We live in a democracy and really don't know what it is like to live under a king. We have a president, who, if we want to, we can vote out of office or re-elect after 4 years. We really don't know what it is like to be the subject of a king, and all that goes along with that. If you are not loyal to the king – it could mean your life!

We have the opportunity in Psalm 95 today to see what kind of King we do have, and then in the Holy Gospel how that King rules his subjects. Psalm 95 reveals to us that our King is God Himself, the creator of the universe, who is also the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep and longs for His people, His sheep, to hear and respond to His voice. *“For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the caverns of the earth, and the heights of the hills are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands have molded the dry land. Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, and kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!”* This is the same shepherd that Ezekiel 34 speaks of who will *“search for his sheep and seek them out.”* This shepherd cares for them, provides for them, leading them to rest. This shepherd has a lot in common with the King in our Gospel message.

In today's Gospel from Matthew, we hear about the King again as a shepherd, who is stern and just. Jesus tells us how the people are divided up at judgment day just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep were on the right and the goats on the left. He speaks to those on his right and says, *“Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”* Then Jesus goes on to say, *“For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”* (Matthew 25:34-36) The sheep, who were the people who were in good relationship with God, were puzzled by this. They said, *“When did we see you hungry and feed you? When did we ever visit you in prison, when did we ever...”* (Matthew 25:37) And the Lord answered, *“Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.”* (Matthew 25:40) How they treated others became as natural as getting up in the morning. But then there are those on the left, Jesus said to them, *“Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.”* (Matthew 25:41-43) Their response was *“Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?”* (Matthew 25:44) Jesus answered, *“Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.”* (Matthew 25:45)

You know - I don't think we are always aware of what it is that we are to do, or that we can do toward helping others around us. There are many acts of mercy and kindness that we all can do each and every day. I personally believe that each one of us is called to be the hands and feet of our Lord Jesus – called to touch the hearts and lives of those we meet. *“Love your neighbors!”* It is not to earn heaven – but from a desire to be more like the profile of the King we serve.

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When Jesus says “*The least of these brothers of mine;*” Who do you think would be “*the least*”? Maybe it’s the poor, or the homeless person who is living on the street in a cardboard box or finding shelter under a bridge. It might be the person who is living on the fringe of society, or maybe it is the person who is not accepted by society because of mistakes or crimes they have done. What about people who can’t take care of themselves because of drug or alcohol problems. It could be the little child who is being mistreated or abused. It could be anyone who is DIFFERENT FROM ME.

One definition of “*the least of these*” that I find interesting is “anyone who is IGNORED or OVERLOOKED.” Well, that could be just about anyone! Another train of thought is labeling them as “that person doesn’t amount to very much, who is not worth helping, of no value, and we are to write that person off.”

Please consider the fact that the “least of them” may not be a believer. They could be someone who doesn’t know the Lord yet. It’s like the lawyer who was trying to justify himself and asked Jesus “*who is my neighbor?*” (which gave Jesus the opportunity to give the Parable of the Good Samaritan – Luke 10:30-37)

Through the eyes of our society we may have been given a picture of who is the “least” but it may not be entirely accurate. I think that there are times when we ALL fall into this category.

- Was there ever a time when you were hurting or in need and someone reached out to you or maybe they **didn’t reach out to you**?
- Was there a time when you just needed someone to talk to and thanks be to God someone was right there for you?
- Or maybe there was a time when you were worried about something and someone prayed for you or helped you in some other way?
- It may have been that you moved to a new town and needed some friendship.

There was a priest who received a letter from some people who had moved there from another town. The letter read: “When my wife and I moved here three years ago, we felt the need to make contact with a local church. We had hoped to make new friends. When we went to your church we heard good sermons but our hope that we would make real contact with our fellow Christians in the same pew - came to absolutely nothing! We often left church as lonely as when we came in.” How utterly tragic! “*I was a stranger and you took me in--or didn’t take me in.*” **Anyone can be the “I” sooner or later.**

When have you been hungry, thirsty, a stranger in need of hospitality, in need of clothes, sick and in need of a caregiver, in prison and somebody reached out to you? That pretty well takes in the basic areas of our lives, doesn’t it? The importance of service when and where service is needed is not overlooked by the King. Jesus says in Matthew 10:42, “*If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.*” Such love for others glorifies God by reflecting our love for Him and it **reflects His character in us!** We get to see the profile of the King, firsthand! We quite often forget that we are made in His image – and even more so – we forget that the person next to you is also made in His image!

The author of Hebrews writes in chapter 6 verse 10 “*For God is not unjust so as to forget your*

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work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.” Our King loves justice, enough to give us opportunities to serve others. I find it remarkable that the people acted surprised when Jesus said, *“you fed me, and you did this for me.”* They asked, *“When did we ever do that?”* He said, *“When you did it for the least of these you were really doing it for me.”* Real justice is serving others who are made in the image of God, **not judging**, but serving – just as our King does.

There was a cobbler who had a shoe shop in a tiny village in Europe. He had a dream that the Jesus would visit him at his little shoe shop. So early in the morning, he got up and swept, dusted, and got his little shop ready for the visit. He baked some bread and cakes, and he waited with great anticipation for Jesus to show up. As the day went by, the cobbler saw an old man outside his shop window that had no shoes on his feet, out in the cold. Moved with compassion, he brought the elderly man inside to warm up and gave him shoes for his feet. As he continued to wait for the Lord to come, he heard a knock at the door. With great excitement he ran to the door only to see a little old lady. She had a bundle of sticks and had not eaten in some time. At first, the cobbler was mad because it was not Jesus. But then he was moved with compassion to bring her into the little shop and gave her something to eat, including the cakes and bread he had made for the Lord. After she had finished eating, he carried her sticks for her to the edge of the village and hurried back in fear he’d miss the Lord, but as he returned, Jesus still was not there.

As the afternoon passed, he waited. Still no Jesus appeared. And then there was another soft rap at the door. He thought surely this must be the Lord. It was a little boy. He asked the cobbler to help him find his way home. The cobbler didn’t want to leave, but his compassion led him to help the little boy find his way home. As fast as he could, he rushed back to the shop only to find it undisturbed. No, the Lord had not been there. Conrad cried in his heart, “Why is it, Lord, Your feet delay? Did you forget that this was the day?” Then in the soft stillness of the little shop, the cobbler heard a voice, “Lift up your heart, for I have kept My word. Three times I came to your friendly door; three times My shadow was on your floor.” The Lord came as the old man with no shoes, the hungry old lady, and the little lost boy. Jesus comes to us in those who need help, are hurting, hungry, thirsty, lost, sick, or locked up in prison. The Body of Christ is called to reach out and help just like that cobbler did.

The profile of our King is one who is filled with compassion for others and is not afraid to get involved. He stepped into time as a baby and grew into a man who would lay his very life down so that He could serve us and save us. That is unlike any king I have ever heard of! The profile of the King is even more remarkable in that He came to serve us. Jesus said in Mark 10:45 *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”* On the night before He died on the cross, Jesus the Christ, our King washed the feet of His disciples.

The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:7 reminds us *“With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men.”* Sometimes we think if we do something for somebody else we will run short ourselves. However, Proverbs 28:27 says, *“He who gives to the poor will never want.”*

When you invite the King of Kings into your life, you may be in for some surprises! Anything you do for other people, you are REALLY doing for Him. The King will bring people across your path and create opportunities for you to help--opportunities that may cost you some time and money. The reward is not of this world but it is in knowing that you have done for the King

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what He has asked you to do. It is what you were made for!

A wise woman who was traveling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry, and the wise woman opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him. She did so without hesitation. The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for the rest of his life. But a few days later he came back to return the stone to the wise woman. "I've been thinking," he said, "I know how valuable the stone is, but I want to give it back to you in the hope that you can give me something even more precious: Please give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone." He apparently could see a true reflection of the profile of the King. We are not to judge! The scriptures are clear – judging is the job and the right - of the King – not ours!

We as disciples and followers of Jesus Christ are called to reflect the profile of the King, showing His love, proclaiming His truth, and helping those in need. These are things that He has entrusted to us – we do not have the power ourselves. **He does!** In just 2 weeks, on December 4th at 1 PM we will have another opportunity for you to join with your brothers and sisters of Compass, our missions ministry, to do something special for our neighbors – by praying for them, and delivering a special message about Jesus, His love and His saving grace. We will be scattering seed. Please come and join us.

In spite of what some may think - there is NOT one of us who can save one soul – but the King CAN and He does. Think of the seed that is scattered – **none of us can make it grow!** We can help to scatter or sow it, we can water, we can nurture it, we can pray for it, **but we cannot make it grow.** The King CAN and He DOES. That my brothers and sisters is the profile of the King, who is relying on us to be His hands and feet, to introduce people to His mercy, His love and His saving grace – and letting HIM do the rest!