



## CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

*Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation*

November 23, 2014      The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

### **Gospel reading Matthew 25:31-46** *[To be read aloud]*

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."

### **Brief commentary:**

Each year the solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe, crowns our liturgical calendar. The feast was instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI following the ravages of the First World War and as the world, especially the West, was increasingly embracing secularism and nationalism. The feast, at the end of the Church's year represents many things: it is a reminder that the true King of the all the world is are not found among the tyrants and dictators, the utopian political ideologies that promise blessing but end up bringing great woe; it is a warning to all to live in the light of the coming Kingdom of God by putting God and people first, by abandoning sin and a life without God, by seeking to live the deepest values of the Gospel – especially genuine compassion – daily; it is a message of eschatological hope, announcing that the future is all good, because God is the future of the universe – injustice and oppression, indifference and selfishness, prejudice and racism, death and sorrow, sin and hatred, do not have a future; only goodness and joy, love and peace have a future. It is the message so powerfully expressed in today's reading of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. It is the Christian Good News: "The last enemy to be destroyed is death. When everything is subjected to God, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all." The other readings (Ezekiel, Psalm, and Gospel) are replete with pastoral imagery. The King of the Universe none other than the loving shepherd of Israel, the one so endearingly described in the Psalm, but also the one who loves right and justice, and has the deepest concern for the vulnerable and frail, the poor and oppressed, the outcast and forgotten. He comes to set things right, to prove evil and mercilessness wrong, and to vindicate kindness and love. The standard of his judgment is compassion: "Whatever you did for the least of my brethren, you did to me." Curiously, nowhere are religious observance or religious sentiments offered as criteria. Religion itself can sometimes become oppressive and used as a weapon, it can become for some a psychological excuse for not attending to the needy, it can become a self-centered activity with little action and responsibility in the everyday world, which is the object of God's great concern. In the Old Testament, it is precisely how people treat people, what happens to the poor and vulnerable, how justice and mercy are being practiced, both individually and by the people as a whole, that is the great concern of Yahweh - so strongly expressed especially both in the Torah and in the Prophets. For Jesus, God and people come first, and true religion is an encounter of God in the neighbor who is in need, by putting the needs of one's neighbor above all else. In Jesus' kingdom, his followers really attend to the hungry and thirsty, the naked and the ill, the prisoner and the foreigner. And he expects this not only to be accomplished by ministries that are set up for this end, but by all his followers. This deep concern for others is what we most find and love in the Jesus of the Gospels, it is his healing touch that has also reached out to each of us, and now we too will gladly share it with others. This encounter of God in the people in need was at the heart of Jesus' own spirituality; it was first and foremost *his* religion. On this feast of Christ the King, let us live anticipating God's ultimate reign of love, joy, peace and life by being agents of his love, joy, peace and life to all, especially towards the ones whom most need our loving help.

### **Today's reading offers significant messages:**

- At the crowning of the Church's liturgical year, the feast of Christ the King proclaims to the entire world that no earthly ruler, no state or government or political system, can legitimately make ultimate claims on human beings. The people do not belong to any earthly ruler or system; the people are sacred because they belong to God, who is the champion of their freedom and the one who truly loves them.
- The eschatological message of Christian hope, so powerfully proclaimed on this day, announces that the future is all good because God – who is love – is the future of all creation. The ultimate reality is not evil or death, it is love and life in God.
- At the heart of this feast is the call to live as witnesses and agents of the values of the Kingdom of God by lovingly serving our sisters and our brothers, our neighbor in need. "On the evening of our lives we will be judged by our love" (Saint John of the Cross).

### **For our shared or personal reflection:**

*After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.*

- How does the feast of Christ the King speak to the oppressions found in our world today?
- How does the Christian good news of eschatological hope fill me with light and strength?
- How can I be an agent of God's reign, of God's love and compassion today and every day?