

Homily for November 26, 2017, Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Another strong message for us to hear as we conclude Matthew's Gospel for the Church year. So, if the Son of Man were to come in his glory today where might we end up - with the sheep or the goats? On his right or his left? If the judgment is based on the *deeds* and *did nots* we just heard, there may be some uncertainty about the answer to that question. If unforgiven or unredeemed sin is what blocks us from heaven, then this gospel shines an important light on sin itself.

As Catholics we are fairly good at teaching the *don'ts* involved in sin: don't lie, don't steal, don't have sex outside of marriage, don't kill, don't swear, don't have false gods. The Confessor does confess sin "for what I have done and what I failed to do" but unless we hear today's gospel, I think we rarely consider "failing to do" as sinful. We know it is a good thing to give to the poor but how often do we consider that *failing* to give food or water or clothing or shelter to the poor is an occasion of sin? I rarely hear those things in confession. How often do we consider that failing to visit the sick or the prisoner or failing to welcome a stranger could block us from eternal life? The gospel gives us heavy and powerful words that give us an opportunity to check ourselves, maybe to wake up - thankfully, *before* the Son of Man comes in glory.

Yet the story Jesus tells is not fear-based, it is relationship based. When you love someone you'll do anything for her or him. "Whatever you do or do not do for one of these least ones, you do or do not do for me." It may be hard at times but it is really quite simple. The King we honor today identifies himself with the "*least ones*", that is the struggling ones, those who may be looked down upon or who are weakest, who are poorest, who have no power, who are seen as "unimportant" in our world - these are the ones about whom Jesus says, "I am them." His life on earth begins as a helpless, powerless baby, born in an insignificant town in a barn. Even after his resurrection, conquering death itself, and even after his ascension into heaven, and we proclaim him King of the Universe, the gospel points the way of a king whose *first* priority is often among our *last* priorities, with what we have left over.

We do not follow a Lord who places supreme importance on bowing to him, as good and holy as that is to do. We follow a Lord who is crucified, who places supreme importance on caring for others - and, through that, we care for and honor him. His kingdom is not a kingdom of power, but of service. As noted in the reading from Ezekiel, *"I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest, says the Lord God. The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal."* When you love someone you'll do anything for them. Sometimes we're the sheep and many times as disciples, we're the shepherd. At the end of the Gospel of John Jesus asks Peter, *"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"* And he answers, *"Yes, Lord, you know I love you."* And Jesus replies, *"Feed and tend my sheep."* When you love someone, you'll do everything for them.