

- **Are you contagious?**

- Today the Church universal celebrates the feast of Christ the King.
 - We celebrate the victory of Christ over sin and death. We celebrate his reigning now in heaven and we anticipate his final victory on earth.
 - This kingdom will be, as our preface tells us: a universal and eternal kingdom: a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace.

- We get a sense of this in our Gospel as Jesus relates with great clarity and poignancy the visual drama of the ultimate coming together between God and humanity
 - Here the King is one of power and might. His mere word the final judgement of all humanity, now separated into sheep and goats, good and bad, left and right.
 - But the image is skewed even in the telling. After all, it's Jesus who proclaims this prophetic narrative, with its sweeping cosmic setting, relating the imperious King shown disposing all things mightily, the same Jesus who will soon be mocked and spat upon as the thorn-crowned King of the Jews.
 - This **prophetic** self-portrait is offered by the Word of God whose Sacred Heart beats both within the suffering Jesus, bruised and broken on the Cross and the triumphant Jesus, the Son of Man who will come gloriously riding on the clouds.

- The hand that will wield the scepter of judgement is the hand that was pierced by nails to be affixed to the Cross.
- This paradox speaks of the Gift of Jesus Christ, God's gift of self, so whole and utterly complete that nothing, absolutely nothing was held back, it is this gift that shows the power of God's love, shows the victory of that love over sin and death.
- It is in this love that we see Jesus redefine what it means to be a king. A king is not merely an overlord who forces his views by stepping on the lowly
- A king is one filled with God's love: who offers rather than forces, who lifts up rather than crushes, who reaches out rather than rides rough shod over those who are less powerful.
- We can celebrate Christ as King because he was willing to suffer and to die for us, because he wanted us to know of God's love and show us how close God wants to be to each of us, because he loved us and loved us and loved us and never stopped loving us.

- Our challenge today and every day, then, to live the love of Jesus Christ, to give of ourselves as he gave of himself, to preach this love with every action of our lives. The question arises as how we do this. How do we prepare for this judgement?
 - This is no surprise quiz sprung upon on the unprepared. Jesus reminds us NOW of the matter for judgement, on what criteria the king will judge.

- The answer is not complex: look after the poor, the naked, the hungry, the homeless, the imprisoned. Take care of these, and you pass the test; hurt or ignore them: you're bound for darkness outside, grinding and wailing of teeth.
- That's only one criterion given: did we help or not? It's that simple. For the Jesus who usually lives in a world of gray's, this is black and white. Those who helped are among the sheep on the right and those who didn't are banned as goats on the left.
- Note Well that singular distinction when judging behavior. The King does not just banish those who actively worked against Him, nor only those who callously exploited these least but any and all who simply ignored them. No one gets a free pass here.
- There is no middle ground and there is no turning back. It's not something too far beyond us, nor something above of our grasp. We cannot put it off and we cannot avoid it.

- And the reason for that is also clear.
 - *For as often as you did it to one of these least ones, you did it to me...*The omnipotent King of Glory shockingly reveals Himself in what Saint Teresa of Calcutta called God's most distressing disguise.
 - Think about that for a moment! The omnipotent God, who created the heavens and the earth, who has unlimited power has just self-identified with the least among us: the despised,

the poor, the hungry, the immigrant, the imprisoned, those the world considers the very dregs of society.

- This is the extraordinarily unique and almost scandalous nature of Jesus’ teaching: the glorious King’s radical self-identification with the suffering, with the least, is conveyed without the slightest restriction.

- As Christians, as those preparing for judgement, we either help God or ignore Him. There is no middle ground.
 - St Josemaría Escrivá said it this way “There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is this life which has to become, in both soul and body, holy and filled with God. We discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things. There is no other way. Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find him” (St Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations*, 114).

- The image of judgement that Jesus uses reminds us to see the other as God in disguise, stressing respect for each and every human person: looking upon the neighbor (without any exception) as another self, bearing in mind, above all, the neighbor’s life and the means necessary for living it in a dignified way...
 - Jesus makes clear here that we have an inescapable duty to make ourselves the neighbor of every person, no matter who he or she is,
 - that, we are to aid in a positive way whoever we meet, whether it be an aged person abandoned by all, a foreign worker

despised without reason, a refugee, an illegitimate child wrongly suffering for another's sin, or a starving human being, any and all who are "least" (See GS #27).

- It's exactly what God was saying through the prophet Ezekiel in our first reading today. Notice who the shepherd goes after: the lost, the strayed, the injured, the sick. The Good Shepherd is among his scattered sheep to tend and rescue them from anything in the dark that could hurt them.
- We are called to reach out and share the gift of God's love we have been given in the same way the Good Shepherd did to the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the thirsty, the naked, the immigrant, the imprisoned.
- We are called to reach out to all and to each one as our neighbor without regard to race, creed, class, social status, economic background, gender, orientation. We are called to see and to serve Christ in them, to see and to show the dignity that comes from our common humanity, created in the image and likeness of God.
- This is what it means to be contagious, giving off what we have received, spreading the love and the joy of the Lord, even to those who may reject it, even to those who think differently, even to those who challenge us.
 - Being contagious is about using our life, our gifts, our talents for the good of the other, reaching out for the other as God reached out to us in Jesus Christ.

- God in Christ has not approached us obliquely, indirectly conveying benefits to us, offering His love through a third party.
- Just the opposite! With the incarnation, God has abolished all distance between himself and us, his beloved creatures.
- Being contagious is about expressing this intimacy in the same direct manner Christ has used. Being contagious is no external mimicry, performing actions because we have to, or doing just enough to save our hides and end up with the sheep. It's a life-long process of transformation that allows the God's divine power to take hold of us and, through us, transforms the world.
- Again, think about that for a moment. The same God who self-identified with the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the immigrant, the imprisoned now works through us to relieve and alleviate their suffering.
- In fact, it is an essential part of God's design that He should live his life through us, with everything that entails.
 - How outrageous is that? As extreme as that sounds, we shouldn't be so surprised after all, since the lover always wants to share and live through his beloved, offer everything that's good
 - God is our lover who loves us absolutely and, as St. Paul reminds us in our second reading wants to be all in all, claiming our whole being, our very life for His purpose of saving all.

- Being contagious, reaching out to others as God has reached out to us is about making our whole lives an heroic attempt to obey Jesus' command: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (6:33).
- This is the Kingdom we are called to participate in building and the one we hope to receive.
- If we are to help build the kingdom, let alone hope to see it fulfilled then we need to be and to bring the contagion of God's love into the world.
 - We are not be able to match the outrageous love God has sown us in mercy and forgiveness, in strength and guidance but we can make a difference, not in the whole world, perhaps but in our little corner.
 - I was reminded recently of that little song: Peace on Earth. Remember it? Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me. Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be. Let it begin with me.
 - It begins with me. Each one of us is called to be the contagion in the world, allowing God's love to seep out of us and flow into the world through our sisters and brothers.
 - Our every thought, word and actions is the method by which either we disseminate and share God's love or become a tourniquet, tying off the means, stemming the flow of that love, hiding it under a bushel basket.

- Next week we start a new liturgical year. More prominent we start the season of Advent and preparing for and celebrating Christ's coming.
- I challenge you to alter your pattern, your routine, your schedule, your normal way of operating to offer some small concrete, real-world witness to Christ as King, some practical way of spreading God's love, of sharing the gift that you have received.
- Make a start even if it seems small and insignificant. After all, God can feed 5,000 with just five loaves and two fish.
- Focus on preparing for those who will be swelling our ranks to celebrate Christmas. Don't think of it as a mob of people forcing you to curb your annoyance at their making parking difficult and sitting in your seat.
- Think specifically and particularly of the people you want to know God's love and with whom you want to share that love. Imagine your friends and family here, those who are not here, those who do not understand, those who reject God, or even worse, think they have been rejected by God.
- Be like the Good Shepherd seeking out the lost, the straying, the sick and weak. Be like Jesus and gather those who are suffering. There is space enough for everyone and everyone should be infected with the love of Jesus Christ. No one should be immune.
- After you have thought practically about who those who will benefit from being infected with the love of Christ, begin

praying for them and asking God to help you open their heart and share the love of Christ.

- Ask God to open further your own heart that together we may create a space of true welcome, not only for Mass at Christmas but into our hearts and lives as well.
- We have a blank banner outside in the narthex. We want it filled with the people we desire to have here. We ask you to write down their names, both to keep it literally in front of you AND to show them when they come at Christmas how intentional you have been in preparing for them. Everyone needs to know that he or she is wanted and appreciated. You don't need to use full names or last names. Use initials or nick names or just first names.
- And we're trying to make it as easy as possible outside of here as well. Start with social media. Like us on Facebook so that all of your Facebook friends will see that we're trying to focus on being contagious rather than increasing numbers, that we seek to spread the love of Christ rather than simply going through the motions.
- We are called to be sheep of the Good Shepherd, to help others come into the fold, to share with them a space in our hearts and lives. We are called to be contagious for Christ.
- *Viva Cristo Rey!!* Long Live Christ the King!!