

Today we commemorate the feast of Christ the King. This feast day only entered the church's calendar in the Twentieth century but it has become a valuable part of our preparations for Advent. Today we recall Jesus in his eternal aspect, as King and Ruler, rather than as he was in his earthly life.

I'd like to start with a rhetorical question. Do you know why dogs and cats are so different? A dog looks at you with those big brown eyes, cocks its head to one side and says to itself, "You love me, you feed me, you care for me, you take me for walks... you must be God". A cat looks at you with those piercing green eyes and thinks to itself "You love me, you feed me, you care for me, you stroke me ... I must be God". There are cat people and there are dog people. There are tennis people and there are golf people. Some people like to sleep with the windows open and some people prefer to sleep with the windows closed - and they are usually married to each other. There are Harrods people and there are T.K. Maxx people. There are Waitrose shoppers and Aldi shoppers. And we all know who we are. Jesus says that ultimately, there are only two kinds of people - the sheep people and the goat people. Do we know which we are?

Here we have a vivid parable that tells us what will happen when the Son of Man comes in glory. Christ the King will separate the sheep from the goats. He will welcome the sheep on his right hand and offer them the kingdom that has been prepared for them since the creation of the world. This in itself is a wonderful thought: there is a place that has been reserved for you from the beginning. There is a place that is yours, it has your name on it and no one else can take it. However, we need to be aware that there is a judgement and it is about love. If we have expressed love, we need have no fear.

So what point is Jesus making? Matthew seems to be ending Jesus' teaching, by recording these words showing that Jesus was serious about expecting lives to be changed by his thinking. It wasn't just for fun, God notices what goes on. God thinks that the lives we lead here on earth are of significance, and so our behaviour has serious consequences. The way in which we treat others is important to God.

Jesus mentions six deeds of mercy. They are not meant to be comprehensive, rather they show that Jesus is concerned by specific material acts of kindness towards the needy. We have many opportunities to help those in need. These acts of kindness can be offered by anyone, we don't need wealth to offer ourselves; to visit, to care, such things all are within reach of everyone.

Listen to what the King says:

I was hungry and you gave me food.

I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.

I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

I was naked and you gave me clothing.

I was sick and you took care of me.

I was in prison and you visited me.

When the people ask when was this, the reply is:

Just as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

Time and again we learn that the way we deal with others is the way we deal with God. If we don't listen to others, we are not likely to listen to God. If we are mean towards others, we have a mean relationship with God. If we only like people who will obey us, we will seek a puppet God. Our faith is reflected in our relationships with each other as well as with God.

As God is in each person, though sometimes so hidden that he is hard to find, we have to treat everyone with reverence and respect. There is no one single person who does not have God hidden within, even though they may live in total disobedience to God. The tramp and the criminal have no less of God than the Archbishop or saint.

So for us, we know that we are called to the service of others, we are also called to work to change oppressive systems and human structures that fail to serve the needy and work against relieving troubled lives and broken spirits. God calls us to take the resources he has given us and use them for the good of all, and to be considerate of the plight of the weak and powerless.

On Christ the King Sunday we must decide to show that Jesus Christ is King in our lives and we must do so by having the courage and commitment to become more and more a part of the reign of God.

The good news is that the challenge which Jesus gives can be fulfilled by anybody. We don't need lots of money to give away, we don't need to find a cure for Cancer. Jesus simply tells his followers to be kind to one another. Look after the poor, visit the sick give food to the hungry. We can all do this, and so we become a part of God's family.

Today we are reaching the end of the Church's year. With the beginning of Advent, we begin again the cycle of the birth of Jesus, his ministry, his death, Passion and resurrection.

The ending of a year is a good time to assess where we have been, what has been achieved, and perhaps most importantly, where we are going with our journey of faith.

If, when we look at our spiritual lives, we feel that we have made no real progress, perhaps it is time to embark on more regular Bible study. Perhaps joining a home group would give us the support we need for growth? Perhaps we would like to put our faith into some kind of action, helping missionary work or community projects.

New beginnings are always exciting, offering us the challenge of new spiritual adventures and development, helping us to show that Christ is King in our lives. During advent it would be good to pray about what adventures God is calling us to in the year ahead. In Jesus' name. Amen.