

## Homily for Feast of Christ the King 2011

It is that time of year when the days get longer and hotter. People head to the beach or flop around the pool! It is a time of last things. Graduations, end of year celebrations at schools, 'schoolies' week. This Sunday is the last of the Liturgical Year. Next Sunday we begin a new Church year with the First Sunday of Advent. This week is also the last week of the English Missal we have been using for the last fifty years. Next Sunday a new translation comes into effect. We have been learning the responses over the last few months. Next week we will be using the prayers as well. So there will be some confusion with your missals until new ones become available. The readings are the same, however.

This feast of Christ the King was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925. It was partly a response to a world beset by the imperialist ambitions of nations which had such disastrous consequences in the First World War and subsequent history. Christ is put before us as King certainly, but a king who is first of all a shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep unlike so many rulers who lay down their subjects lives in order to retain power.

The Gospel story today comes also at the end of Matthew's Gospel. It is a story about the last times. We think of it as describing the last judgement. And it does pass judgement on the world. But in fact it is a story of the Lord passing sentence. Because judgement has already been done. We have put ourselves on the left or right of the king by our actions. We have made ourselves one of the sheep or one of the goats. All the king has to do is separate them out.

These acts of mercy Jesus says are critical. They have come to be called, with variations, the "corporeal works of mercy". Calling them that does not mean they are nice options to think about. After everything else he has said Jesus keeps coming back to some very basic actions which define a person who is close to the Kingdom of God. These works of mercy are also very ordinary things. They are not hard to understand. Even though they may be hard to do. They are ordinary things which people do every day, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry and so on. You do it every day for your children.

However, we can be very selective about who we show such mercy to. As long as they fit our idea of a person as being worthy of our care we are fine. Anything beyond that, the spirit of the world regards as the territory of bleeding hearts, as they say. But Jesus is uncompromising. It does not matter what the person in prison has done we need to respect their human dignity. It does not matter how a refugee arrives they deserve shelter. It all comes down to the notion at the heart of Christian and Catholic morality that each and every person has a dignity that needs to be respected at all stages of their life. If we are not respecting the dignity of all from the unborn to the very old then we really have nothing left. We are at the mercy of our whims and feelings. Then politics decides what is right or wrong. Without respect for the dignity of a person all our opinions can quickly become ideologies which do not free people but continue to imprison them.

It is interesting that Jesus welcomes even those who do not recognise him. When did we see you hungry or naked? and so on, they ask. The invitation to the Kingdom is to all irrespective of who they are or what religion they belong to. In so far as you did it to the least of these you did it to me. He is simply emphasising the commands he spoke of earlier, you must love God and your neighbour as yourself. But if this is so why bother with being Christian? Anyone is capable of doing these works of mercy. First of all we bother to be Christian because of what we know so well. That our world is notorious for its neglect of just these works of mercy. Our world is awash with leaders who would be kings who use their position to show the greatest disrespect for the dignity of God's people that God loves. Second, we bother to be Christian, because through Jesus the Shepherd, we know the God from whom that dignity comes and to whom we owe everything.