You did it for me: Recognise Christ in our brothers and sisters

Dear Parishioners, this weekend we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King, which marks the end of the liturgical year. The Church invites us to reflect on the kingship of Jesus Christ. But the King we celebrate today is very different from the kings of this world. While earthly leaders exercise authority and expect others to serve them, Jesus comes among us as a humble Shepherd. He does not come to be served, but to serve. His throne is the Cross, His crown is made of thorns, and His Kingdom is built on love, sacrifice, justice, compassion and mercy.

The first reading and the psalm present Jesus as the Good Shepherd who does not abandon His people when they are wounded, discouraged or lost. He finds, heals, protects and guides them. He is not a distant ruler. He is a King who knows us by name, understands our weaknesses, and searches for us when we go astray.

As St Augustine reminds us: "Christ is both above us and within us. He is the Shepherd who seeks us, and the Lamb who gives Himself for us."

Sometimes we forget that we are also among the sheep who need the Shepherd's care. We experience disappointments, family difficulties, financial pressures, sickness, loneliness and uncertainty about the future. Yet Christ does not abandon us.

And having experienced His care, we are called to become instruments of His care for others. If Christ has comforted us, we must comfort others. If He has forgiven us, we must forgive. If He has welcomed us, we must welcome others. We cannot be followers of the Good Shepherd while refusing to care for His sheep.

The Gospel invites us to recognise Christ in the least of people. The measure of Jesus' judgement on the last day is not wealth, social status, education or popularity. It is how we treat people in need. The King says: "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."

The righteous, surprised, will ask when they did this. And He answers with words that should remain in our hearts: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40)

Dear friends, always remember this: "You did it for me." This is the heart of this weekend's celebration. When we encounter someone in need, we are encountering Him.

Think of those around us. The elderly who spend days without visitors, whose greatest hunger may not be for food, but for someone to sit with them and listen. Families struggling with the rising cost of living, worried about bills and providing for their children. Newcomers who have left their countries and struggle with loneliness, language and finding their place. People who smile at us but carry heavy burdens of sickness, grief and unemployment.

Jesus is saying to us: When you care for them, you care for me.

St John Chrysostom challenges us in his Homily on Matthew: _"Do you wish to honour the Body of Christ? Do not ignore Him when He is naked. Do not honour Him here with silk vestments, and then leave Him outside, suffering cold and nakedness. "What a powerful examination of our Christian lives! One of the most disturbing aspects of this weekend's Gospel is that those condemned did not necessarily commit great crimes. They simply failed to respond to human need. It is the sin of omission. We see someone struggling but pretend not to notice. We hear a neighbour is sick but never make time to visit. We may convince ourselves these are small matters. But in the eyes of Christ, love is never a small matter. A telephone call, a visit, a sincere apology, a kind word, a listening ear — never underestimate the power of a small act of love.

As St Teresa of Calcutta said: “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” One day we will stand before Christ the King. The question will not be: How many years did you spend in the Church? How many positions did you hold? How much did you accumulate? The deeper question will be: How much did you love? Did you remember the lonely? Did you care for the sick? Did you welcome the stranger?

This is not to suggest that good works replace faith. Rather, genuine faith must bear fruit in love. As St James reminds us, faith without works is dead (James 2:17).

Dear brothers and sisters, as we celebrate Christ the King, let us remember that the greatness of His Kingdom is measured by love and service. Our King is present in the Eucharist, but He also meets us in the poor, the lonely, the sick, the stranger and the forgotten.

As we receive Him in Holy Communion today, let us ask for the grace to recognise Christ in others. Serve Christ in others. Love Christ through others.