

We celebrate today the Feast of Christ our King. It is the culmination of the Church year as we celebrate Christ gathering all things to himself and ruling as Lord of all creation.

But the images presented to us in the readings speak very little of kingship directly. The word "King" appears a couple of times in the Gospel, though in fact we have are presented rather with other images of Christ, images which explain what kind of King he is.

“Love thy neighbour... even if he plays the trombone.” That’s a lovely Yiddish proverb that reflects the essence, if not the sober tone, of this Sunday’s gospel. Few of us have the makings of a Mother Teresa. We’ll probably never be called on to drag the destitute and dying off the streets and into our homes. But chances are God will place lots of suffering people in our paths, either directly or tangentially. They may not prove to be grateful for our help. And more than likely, they’ll be inconvenient and even annoying. But we ignore them at our peril.

Not only are the poor always with us, but so are the frail, the challenged, the depressed, the aged, the troubled, the addicted...they’re in our towns, our neighbourhoods... even in our families. They come afflicted with every stripe and degree of pathology. They are of every age, race and condition. But they have one single unifying characteristic. They, like each of us, are made in the image and likeness of God. Their immortal souls reflect their maker. They are God’s beloved. Jesus died for each and every one. No matter their condition, they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We must love them.

This gospel commands us to look past their brokenness and blemishes... to see the beatific vision of Jesus beaming back at us. But to see Christ in others we must learn to see through the eyes of love... that is through the eyes of Christ, who is God’s love incarnate. Like all other graces, that perspective is a gift from God, not an aptitude that we can acquire. But

once that grace is received, it cannot be ignored. It requires practice and prayerful application. Seeing through the eyes of Christ, living in his love, gives every one of us the opportunity to stand among the saints, to be heroic, to empty ourselves and be filled with God’s grace.

In Proverbs 29, the Bible teaches us: Where there is no vision, the people perish. Faith is the power behind this saving “vision.” It creates an inspiring system of shared values. And that requires a shared perspective. The operative concept of this gospel is to share the perspective of Jesus, to embrace his vision, to see the world through the eyes of his love. This week’s parable poses the question: Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and... thirsty? God’s conclusion and our instructions are contained in the answer: As you did it to...the least of these...you did it to me.

We cannot overstate the significance of this gospel. It is Christ’s final public statement before giving himself up to the cross. It is the climax of the ecclesiastical year. Yes, there is poetry here... but the message is straightforward and imperative... no artful solicitation ... no cajoling... no lofty appeal. Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. Welcome the stranger. Nurse the sick. Visit the imprisoned. See Christ and love him in those in need. These are our marching orders in good times and bad.

What better time to put this lesson to work? Our love... translated into the currency of time, talent and treasure... is needed now more than ever, both in our congregation and in the community. Jesus has told us where to look for him and how to find him. Let’s not keep him waiting.

When this Gospel is read, often the reading ends with the reward of the virtuous. It may be for reasons of length, but it may also be because we have a slight apprehension that our place amongst the sheep might not be as secure as we would hope. The gentle shepherd may seem a little too demanding for us.

But the message is not different, but the same. Just as we may be poor in needing his compassion to lift up our drooping spirit, so we are rich in being able to offer that compassion to others. He calls on us too to clothe the naked, visit the sick, feed the hungry, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded, make the weak strong.

This is not a fierce and painful judgment, but no more than a challenge to share what we have been given, to forgive others as we are forgiven ourselves, to show mercy to others as his mercy has been given to us, to love as we are loved.