

Christ the King - Matthew 25:31-46

A five-year-old boy was stalling going to bed. He asked for a glass of juice. "No, sir," his father answered. "No more juice. I'm king of the juice in this house." "That's not right, Daddy," the young fellow said. "Our Sunday school teacher said Jesus is the king of the juice."

Today's Gospel passage is one of the most famous in the New Testament. It has left a deep impression upon our imaginations and upon Christian art. Throughout the world, in cathedrals and art museums, you can see depictions of the scene that was just proclaimed.

Jesus seated on His royal throne with the world gathered before Him. He divides all the nations into two groups, the sheep and the goats, the just and the unjust, the blessed and the damned.

It is also clear on what criterion the division is made. It is giving, or not giving, to the least among us.

This is a heavy Gospel because it tells us that our relationship to Jesus, now and forever, is determined on how we serve the hungry, the stranger, the sick, or imprisoned. Whatever we give or fail to give to them, we give or fail to give to Jesus.

Now, the message of this Gospel is so powerful and clear that you might imagine that there is no additional insight we can find in this passage.

But the Scriptures are so rich that with a little effort we can find something more. What if we were to imagine that the story went on a bit longer? What if we were to imagine that the goats spoke back?

After Jesus accused them of failing to serve him because they did not feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, and visit the

imprisoned, what the if goats said, “Lord, we tried to serve the least among us but they would not accept it!”

Giving is important and this passage tells us that giving is eternally important. Yet it is impossible to give unless someone is willing to receive, and receiving is an attitude that is really not that popular.

It may be true, as the old saying goes, “It is better to give than to receive.” But it is also true that it is **easier** to give than to receive.

Giving puts us in a position of strength. We are in control and we receive deep satisfaction from giving to others. Receiving places us in an attitude of weakness. It emphasizes our dependency and it makes us feel indebted.

Receiving shakes our pride in our self-sufficiency and in our success. That is why most of us resist receiving. In fact, we are at times willing to deny our need rather than to accept something from another.

Now, this attitude is false and destructive. Anyone recovering from drugs or alcohol could make this clear to us. Owning our need and our dependency on others is the way to healing and the way to life. Yet we find it difficult to accept help from another.

How many times might a family member or friend say to us, “How are you doing? Is there something wrong? Do you need to talk?” and our response is, “No, I’m fine. I’m going to deal with this on my own.”

How many times when we are sick or grieving will someone say, “Are you okay? Is there anything that I can do? Can I stop over and pay you a visit?” and our response is, “No, I’m OK. I don’t want to bother you.”

We find it so hard to ask for help, so hard to say, “Could you show me how to do this? I don’t understand. Could you stop over? I just need someone to talk to. Could I have a few dollars? I’m short this month.”

Jesus says that we must give to the least among us, but none of us want to be the least among us.

We all want to be the givers. But, if everybody is a giver, then there will not be enough receivers to go around.

So today’s Gospel is clear: When we have a need, we should admit that need. We should put our pride aside and accept from another.

Then, if we receive from others, maybe they will receive from us, and in time, all of us will have a chance to give.

Receiving is important. We might think that refusing to accept from another is a sign of nobleness, but it is actually a form of selfishness.

When we refuse to receive from others, we are denying them the opportunity of serving Christ Himself. So when you are in need, allow yourself to receive from others. It might be uncomfortable to accept their services, but doing so is important.

In fact, their salvation depends upon it.

“Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs? Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me.”

AMEN.