

Year A Christ the King

Matthew 25:31-46

HOMILY

People's basic material needs have to be taken care of before any kind of higher life is possible. Christ said that his followers would be judged on their response to those needs. But today in many countries these needs, by and large, have been taken care of. Does this mean that the words of Christ are no longer relevant? No indeed, for the Bible says we do not live on bread alone, that is, on material things alone. We have many other needs.

Mother Teresa says: 'The biggest disease in the world today is not leprosy or TB, but the feeling of being unwanted and uncared for. The greatest evil in the world is lack of love, the terrible indifference towards one's neighbour. What the poor (and not just the poor) need even more than food, clothes, and shelter, is to be wanted.' Hence, the immortal words of Christ are as relevant today as ever. What we need to do, perhaps, is to restate them. What follows is an attempt at doing this.

'Then the King will say to those on his left hand, "Depart from me for I was *hungry*, not for food but for a smile, and all I got from you was sour looks. I was hungry for a word of encouragement, but all you did was point out my mistakes. I was hungry for a word of appreciation, but you didn't give me so much as a crumb.

' "I was *thirsty*, not for drink, but for a word of recognition, but all you did nag and give out to me. I was thirsty for a sign of friendship, but you ignored me. I was thirsty for a little companionship, but you never gave me a drop.

' "I was a *stranger*, no, not a foreigner, but just someone who was different from you, and you refused to have anything to do with me. I was a child and you forbade your children to play with me because my clothes were dirty. I was a neighbour and you wouldn't allow me into your club because I wasn't

in your class.

' "I was *naked*, not because I lacked clothes, but because I lacked self-worth, and you refused to cover me. I was stripped of self-confidence and you made me feel the chill wind of your dismissal. I was naked from the loss of my good name through a story that was not true, and you refused to clothe me with the garment of truth.

' "I was *sick*, not in body, but with doubt and worry, and you never even noticed. I was wounded by failure and disappointment, and you couldn't care less. I was sunk in a pit of depression, desperately needing the medicine of hope, and all you did was blame me.

' "I was in *prison*, not in one made of iron bars, but in a prison of nerves, and you shunned me. I was in a prison of loneliness and you gave me the cold shoulder. I was in a prison of guilt. You could have set me free by forgiving me, but you let me languish there to punish me.

' "I was *homeless*, not for want of a home made of bricks and mortar, but for the want of tenderness and affection, and you left me out in the cold. I was homeless for the want of sympathy and understanding, and you treated me as if I was a block of wood. I was homeless for want of care, love, and acceptance, and you locked me out of your heart".

'Then the King will turn to those on his right hand and say: "Come, you have been blessed by my Father, receive the Kingdom that has been prepared for you since the foundation of the world.

' "For I was *hungry* for a smile and you smiled on me. I was hungry for a word of encouragement and you praised me. I was hungry for a word of appreciation and you thanked me.

' "I was *thirsty* for a word of recognition and you took notice of me. I was thirsty for a sign of friendship and you wrote me a letter. I was thirsty for a little companionship and you stopped to chat with me.

' "I was a *stranger* and you made me feel welcome. I was a young person

from a bad area and you gave me a job. I was socially inferior to you but by your acceptance you built me up.

' "I was *naked* for the want of self-worth and you covered me with esteem. I was stripped of self-confidence and you dressed me in the cloak of confidence. I was naked from the loss of my good name through a story that was untrue, and you clothed me in the garment of truth.

' "I was *sick* with doubt and worry, and with your cheerful attitude you lightened my burden. I was wounded by failure and disappointment, and by your supportive attitude you healed me. I was in a pit of depression, and by your patient attitude you gave me hope.

' "I was in a *prison* of nerves, and through your attitude of calm you set me free. I was in a prison of loneliness, and through friendship you released me. I was in a prison of guilt, and through your forgiveness you broke the chains of my guilt.

' "I was *homeless* for want of tenderness and affection, and you hugged me. I was homeless for want of sympathy and understanding, and you listened to me. I was homeless from want of care, love, and acceptance, and you opened your heart and took me in." '

There are so many kind things we could do for one another if we were a little more aware and sensitive. It is not a question of doing great things, but of doing little things with great love (as Mother Teresa says). Nor, in most cases, is it a question of *giving things*. Rather it is a question of *giving of ourselves*, of our time, our energy, and our love. Those who love, do so without show, and without expecting any reward. We are serving Christ and helping to build his Kingdom when we love others sincerely, in simple, practical, everyday ways.

Would it not be terrible to have to appear before Christ never having loved? Today's Gospel is so important and central that if we were to forget everything else, and remember and practise only this, we would be o.k. For

a Christian there is really only one failure, one sin, and that is not to love.
'In the evening of life we shall be examined on love.' (St John of the Cross).
'Hell is the suffering of one who can no longer love.' (Dostoyevsky).

On a cold wintry day
a man saw a small girl standing at a street corner.
She was shivering with the cold,
and starving for want of a decent meal.
The man got angry and said to God: 'Why do you allow this to happen? Why
don't you do something about it?'
And God replied:
'I have already done something about it.
I made you'. *[Pause]*

'As long as you did it to one of these, you did it to me.'
These unforgettable words of Christ are at the very heart of the Gospel.
Every day we get some chance to put them into practice.