November 23, 2014 ~ Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King, Year A

**Up Close and Personal**
Matthew 25:31-46

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“When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?” And the king will say to them in reply, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.”  
[Matthew 25:37-40]

I’m happy to report that my recent treadmill test shows I’m doing okay at age sixty. However, a blood test shows that my cholesterol remains high. I seem to have the high-cholesterol gene.

The point here is that we have standard tests to measure physical health. Similarly, in today’s Gospel parable about the Last Judgment, Jesus the physician presents us with a standard test for measuring our spiritual health, listing six ways we can score our relationship with him. We Catholics typically refer to them as *corporal works of mercy*.

Teenagers: here’s what the parable can mean for you. In the spiritual life, Jesus invites you to an up-close-and-personal relationship with him. Yes, in this sacred space, you meet up with Jesus who speaks to your heart in the proclamation of the Gospel and enters your life when you say *Amen!* to the Sacrament of this altar. However, your up-close-and-personal relationship with Jesus doesn’t end with Communion. When you and I go forth from this church, our mission is to have an ongoing relationship with Jesus.

With today’s Gospel parable, Jesus reminds us that we have a relationship with him by having a relationship with people whom our society so easily overlooks: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. With today’s Gospel parable, Jesus offers us a treadmill test for the spiritual life. It might not be an easy test to score ourselves with, but neither was the treadmill test I recently took at my doctor’s office.

And yet, I see plenty of evidence that people see Jesus as present in those whom others easily overlook.

I invite you to check out the layettes on the table along the wall near our baptismal font. Throughout the year, parishioners have been knitting blankets and other items for newborn babies. Other folks have brought in store-bought items. It will all go to young mothers who otherwise can’t afford such items for their babies. I see the layette items as lining up with serving Jesus by clothing the naked and welcoming the stranger (after all,
the young mothers and their babies are almost always unknown to those who supply the
items).

I think of our parishioners who travel up to Vacaville prison. Once they arrive there, they
pass through layers of security to spend time with prisoners, sharing their Catholic faith
and sharing the compassion they know to be God’s compassion. By visiting the prisoners,
they are visiting Jesus.

When I moved to St. Thomas of Canterbury last year, a first impression came from our
once-a-month gathering of food. Every third Sunday of the month, folks bring forward
bags of groceries and put them in front of the altar. By feeding the hungry, you are
feeding Jesus.

Parishioners here regularly visit the sick, the homebound, and the dying, bringing them
Communion and listening to them patiently and with interest. By visiting the sick, you
are visiting Jesus.

As I was writing this homily, I realized that I couldn’t only offer you my words, so I go
to the website for Catholic Relief Services (crs.org) and donated $250 for humanitarian
assistance in Iraq. If I can’t see the presence of Jesus in 1.8 million people in crisis,
including 580,000 people in need of shelter, then I have no business preaching this
homily.

As a people of faith, we propose to the world that the best definition of God is found in
the New Testament’s First Letter of John. It’s only three words long: God is love.¹ We
also propose to the world that the best expression and the very first Sacrament of God’s
love is the person of Jesus. That’s the Gospel we proclaim from this ambo. That’s the
Gospel we live for the rest of the week. As it’s been said, for many people, you and I will
be the only version of the Gospel they will come to know.

With today’s parable, Jesus clearly sets a high standard for us that’s too easy to dismiss.

Seven years ago, some folks in Holland put out a Bible that’s full of holes. They cut out
all the passages about the poor and giving money away. They see Western culture as
materialistic and as uncomfortable with lifestyles that pay attention to people in need. So,
as a spoof, they produce a Bible that’s more comfortable for people to read. It’s full of
holes. It’s priced at €2.50 and is available only in Dutch.²

And yet, we take to heart this challenging parable on today’s feast honoring Jesus as
Christ the King. Although this title has roots dating back to Biblical times, this feast day
began only ninety years ago.

World War I devastates Europe and other regions of the world, with 39 million soldiers
ekilled, wounded, or missing. Pope Pius XI sees what that war does to western civilization
and societies. He also sees the rise of fascism, nationalism, absolutism, secularism,
atheism, and other isms.
In 1925, Pope Pius XI decides to adopt this Solemnity of Christ the King, hoping to remind the world that all human authority falls beneath the authority of Jesus. Today’s parable reminds us that the authority of Jesus is not expressed in the destruction of human lives, but in the service of love, particularly to those who are most vulnerable and overlooked.

Jesus calls us to a relationship that’s up close and personal: *Whatever you do for one of the least brothers and sisters of mine, you do for me.*

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1 John 4:8.