

**Readings:** *Ezekiel 34:11 – 12, 15 – 17; Ps 22(23); 1 Corinthians 15:20 - 28; Matthew 25: 31 – 46.*

In each of the three years of the cycle of Readings, our celebration of Christ the King reflects on a different aspect of his kingship. As we end the Year of Matthew, we are presented in the Gospel Reading with the picture of the King as Judge. In the ancient world it was expected that the king in person would put right all that was wrong in his kingdom. In Psalm 72, a prayer for the king, we read: *O God, give your judgement to the king, to a king's son your justice, that he may judge your people in justice and your poor in right judgement. May he defend the poor of the people and save the children of the needy.* The king is not applying an abstract theory of justice, he is actively bringing about what is right.

In today's Gospel we see the king at work in precisely this way. He is faced with a world in which there are people who are hungry, thirsty, without shelter or clothing, sick or in prison; and there are those who have helped these needy people and those who have ignored them. It is his duty and his right to redress these ills.

We should note that in this parable the king's judgement is universal: it is *all the nations* – not just the Christian faithful – who are *assembled before him*. All alike – the believer and the unbeliever are judged by the same standard – the standard of divine charity.

That standard is absolutely just, because it is the expression of the judge's own nature, and it is applied justly, because the judge *knows the secrets of human hearts*.

Each of us must, of course, take the message to our own heart, asking whether we have done what we could to relieve the needs of our fellow men and women.

But there is a wider application of the parable, for it seems that all who are judged are ignorant of the person of the judge – they do not recognise him in the needy, who, he says are his brothers, (and that includes sisters). But, in their ignorance, some show charity and some do not. And those who do will discover to their surprise that they have been kind to their king.

Here is an answer to the question that is sometimes asked "What about those who act with charity, even though, they do not know Jesus?" *Come you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world.*