

*Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe; Year A; Mt. 25:31-46*

**My Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

For many people today, the word, king, is something out of ancient history. Kings and Kingdoms, as a possible form of government, have greatly reduced in the last two hundred years.

But when we think of a king, we usually think of a man who lives in a palace, wears the very best clothes, eats lavishly on the very finest foods, issues decrees which have the force of law, and commands an army which enforces those decrees. In other words, when we think of a king, we think of wealth and power.

Today is the final Sunday of the church year, a day on which we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. In keeping with that subject, our gospel reading describes Christ as coming in glory, escorted by angels, seated upon a throne, and exercising authority over all the nations of the world. But this part of the reading is what scholars call “an eschatological vision,” which means an image of how things will be at the end of time. So what we have is a picture of Christ the King at the end of time.

But what about today, where is our King right now?

In the Broadway musical, “Camelot,” there is a song that pictures the people of the kingdom saying, “I wonder what the king is doing tonight.” Suppose we borrow that thought for a few moments and wonder what our King is doing today.

The answer to that question is not altogether a matter of imagination. That same gospel reading, which carries us to the end of time and pictures Christ upon a throne, then does a flashback and tells us where he was and what he was doing in the days prior to that enthronement. And here we are given a description of a very strange kind of King.

A few moments ago, we were saying that the word, king, call up visions of great wealth; but the King in our reading describes himself in terms of great need.

Instead of dining lavishly on the very finest foods as most kings do, our King is hungry today. That is the testimony from his own lips. Seated upon his throne at the end of time, he looked back to this very day and said, “I was hungry.” And he did not mean just slightly hungry, as you and I use the word when we have missed a meal or gone on a diet. He meant desperately hungry.

You may not have realized it, but you have seen pictures of him recently on television and in newspapers and magazines. His eyes were hollow; his face was skinny. You could count his ribs. In fact, he looked like a living skeleton. Ours is a strange kind of king.

If you wonder what he is doing today, I can tell you. He is starving to death with the thousands of hungry men, women, and children in many places around the world.

Another strange thing about our King is that he has no home. Most kings have a kingdom and a castle. Our king is a stranger, a homeless. If you wanted to see him today, you could find him in on our streets. Wherever there are people wandering homeless on the face of the earth, he is there with them.

But in your search for him, don't look for a man in purple robes. This king doesn't have any. He might even be naked, because he is poor. At the very best, he will be wearing worn out shoes and a tattered coat.

And if you don't find him among the homeless and poor, check the hospitals. He may be there. In our reading, he tells us that he was sick; and the place to look for a sick man is in the hospital. Or on second thought, it may be that he needs to go to the hospital but can't afford it. This is a strange kind of King. Most men who wear that title have their own personal physicians. Our King is both poor and sick and languishes for need of someone who even cares.

Then there is one other place we might find our King, the strangest place of all - behind bars. That sounds almost unbelievable, but he said it, "I was in prison."

What is this? Kings don't go to prison; they put other people there. But not this King, he is different. He has seen more than one jail from the inside. Almost Eighty years ago he was in the death camps with the Jews. Today he is with political prisoners all over the world. He is with the innocent. He is even with the guilty. The man who died with two thieves on Calvary is not too polite and delicate to sit with them in a jail cell.

A strange kind of King – hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick and in prison; most kings are known for their wealth. Our King is known for his want.

There is another strange thing about him, and that is the way he works. I think of power, authority, someone who issues orders and demands obedience. A king is a powerful man who can get what he wants by pushing people around. But this strange King of ours waits for, and works through volunteers. That is the only way he works.

Everywhere there is a needy person on the face of the earth, he not only is with that person, but he is that person, waiting to be helped. But we don't have to help him, not unless we choose to. He is not going to send us a draft notice and recruit us into his army of mercy. We will either volunteer, or we won't go.

## **My Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

That choice is ours, but we should make it carefully. One day we will stand before him and answer to him. Surely we want to stand with those to whom he says, “Come. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me. As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me.” **Amen.**