

Christ the King Year A
November 20, 2011
St. Luke Sheboygan Falls
Matthew 25:31-46

True Royalty

Let us pray. Lord, open our eyes to your face in the needs of those around us.
AMEN.

Many Americans have an obsession with royalty. When England's Prince William married Kate Middleton there was plenty of attention in the U.S. media. Then there's the "Hollywood" royalty. I'll never understand the attraction some people have for the likes of the Kardashian family or Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie and their brood. It seems many ordinary Americans have a fascination with glimpsing "how the other half lives"—the lives of the rich and famous.

Today we celebrate "Christ the King" Sunday. Our Gospel reading from Matthew reveals that Jesus is a much different breed

of royalty. In the beginning the Son of Man as Jesus refers to himself appears as a typical king, sitting on his throne in glory. All the nations are gathered before him for a sorting into those who are blessed (the sheep) and those who are accursed (the goats). These sheep and goats are of course not animals, but people and at first, the king appears to be "above it all" as he separates one from another.

We soon discover that the face of the King is not what we might expect. This King is one who fully identifies not with the rich and mighty, but the "least of these." Jesus says that whenever we give food to the hungry, welcomed a stranger, clothed the naked or visited the sick or imprisoned it is as though we did it to Him. Jesus can identify with the least and the lost because he has walked in their shoes.

To act on behalf of those in need, even for the King of Kings, was not a gesture of pity, a sort of giving at arms' length. In today's economy especially, many of us could be just a paycheck away from needing to make huge lifestyle changes. Few people are as safe and secure financially as we once were. So when we help out our sisters and brothers who are hungry, cold, sick, imprisoned, we do with compassion.

Compassion is a word that comes from the Latin: "suffer together." Somehow we connect with those who are hurting and troubled in God's name and we receive blessing even as we give it.

I think of the opportunity that we as a congregation had a few years ago to bring Arnold, Sauda and Fleli here as refugees from Burundi, Africa. Now they have expanded their family and are living as

independent and productive members of the community. Through compassion we were blessed to walk alongside them as they built a new life.

Often when I visit people in the hospital or give Communion to the homebound, I receive more blessing from them than they do from me. Those who go caroling at Christmas time also get a taste of that experience in the smiles and shining eyes of those we visit. We don't always recognize that in those moments it is the face of Jesus gazing back at us.

We all get busy, especially at this time of year and we often think we don't have time to do those extra little things like visiting, picking up small gifts for children's shoe boxes or nursing home residents, writing a Christmas card to that lonely aunt or uncle we hardly see, snowblowing for a sick neighbor, buying coffee for that friend

who is desperate to talk. Time is such a gift and so many of us hoard it when giving it can truly cause it to multiply in so many unforeseen ways. Right now, I'm so grateful for every moment I took to visit my mom, because now, looking back, I can even more clearly see the Jesus that was in her eyes.

That is the kind of King we worship. He looks back at us from wrinkled faces, dirty faces, hungry faces, tiny faces, pale, sick and drawn faces, many colored faces, unfamiliar and oh, so familiar faces, shining with gratitude faces and yes, ultimately, we are the ones who are blessed because we know a King who does not sit enthroned like the Kings of this world distant and aloof. We know a King who brings real peace, who sees the needy and who hears the cries of the oppressed. We know a King who promises a kingdom where no one is hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned or

alone and calls us to begin to make a difference even now. AMEN.