

## *Christ the King: The Day of Judgment*

At one time or another, all of us have missed an opportunity that could have changed our life if only we had seized the moment, if only we had been a bit bolder, if only we had taken a risk. And so we lament, if only I knew then what I know now, how different my life would have been. If only I knew then, what I know now, I would have trusted more, I would have dared more, I would have acted more boldly. I would have lived with more faith, with more hope, with more love, with more and generosity. But alas, none of us knows the future.

But there is something we do know. We know that in God's way, in God's time, Jesus Christ will return at the end of the ages to judge the living and the dead. We know that God will have the last word, the final word, the only word that counts. We know that we must stand before the judgment seat of God and give an account of what we have done and failed to do. And we know that at that moment our lives will be revealed for what they truly are. For in the glorious light of God's presence nothing can be concealed, nothing can be hidden. In that light we will see and understand ourselves for the first time.

God's final judgment is a fearful prospect. After all, how can I stand in the presence of God who is all holy, sinful one that I am? Who will defend me when I stand in the court of God's justice? Is there anything I have done that can bring mercy and forgiveness? Jesus answers this question in today's gospel when he says

that whatever we do to the least of his brothers and sisters we do to him. If we have been merciful to others; God will be merciful to us. If we have treated others with compassion, God will treat us with compassion. If we have cared for those who could not care for themselves, God will be merciful to us.

The most striking moment in today's gospel is the utter surprise of those who stand before Christ. The righteous are completely taken aback when they learn that in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked they were serving Christ. They did not realize that Christ had associated himself so intimately with the poor and downcast of the earth. They simply acted out of mercy and compassion for those in need.

Like the righteous, the wicked are completely surprised when they learn that Christ was present in the sick and imprisoned that they ignored. They protest that if only they had known that Christ was in the needy they would have acted differently. But would they? If they were not compassionate to those in need why would they be compassionate to Christ?

There is no need for us to lament "if only I knew then what I know now," for we *already* know what the criterion of God's judgment will be—the compassion and mercy we extend to others is the measure of the compassion and mercy God will extend to us. For Christ is forever hidden in the poor and downtrodden; Christ is forever concealed in the poor and needy.