

## 34<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME YEAR A HOMILY 2020

### CHRIST THE KING – PRINCE OF PEACE

*Mt 25.31-46*

*Ez 34.11-17*

*1Cor 15.20-38*

Welcome once more to our virtual celebration of Eucharist on the Feast of Christ the King, as Prince of Peace, instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925, in reaction to the aftermath of World War I, where he noted the hostilities had ceased, but that there was still no true world peace, due to ongoing class divisions and unbridled nationalism, still serious problems in our world of today!

From next weekend of 28-29<sup>th</sup> November, it is anticipated that 100 may attend church services, so that we hope to open up for Mass at the normal weekend times from then, having already opened up for 20 parishioners to attend morning Mass from Wednesday to Friday, with the requirement of booking in beforehand for weekend Masses from now on.

And so we gather in spirit and pray together.

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The theme of this last weekend of the Church's Year A, the Feast of Christ the King, is a very practical call to be responsible, responsive and active, sensitive to the basic needs of all of humanity, as faithful disciples of Jesus.

This week I spent time with Grade 3 students, following through on their celebration of First Reconciliation, one to one, after the hiatus from mid-March, when they joined with parents and teachers for a Penance Paraliturgical. Generally, I suggest a simple penance along the lines of a short personal prayer and something practical to do to be helpful at home. One response to this was straightforward and well-put: "*You mean an act of loving kindness?*", with which I concurred. Here is where today's Gospel fits in too. It's not rocket science, to live well as a follower of Jesus. And it's the Gospel we chose for my Mum's funeral back in March 2003, as she was very much into practical Christianity and hospitality to all comers.

It is worth noting that Jesus provides no detailed template or model for structures of the Church he inaugurates, nor a lengthy list of rules and regulations. In Matthew's account, we have the spirit of the Beatitudes (*'Be-Attitudes', as I call them!*), the law of love of God, neighbour and self, and now the final discourse of Jesus on requirements of Christian behaviour, and not just limited to looking after one's own inner circle or social or ethnic group. This is a universal call to respond to the needs of all of humanity, and don't we still have a long way to go in our global village of nearly 8 billion people. We all inhabit the precious and fragile *Pale Blue Dot*, photographed by NASA's Voyager I (6 billion km from the Sun), as described by astronomer Carl Sagan, who says: "*There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.*"

The last judgement is depicted by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel mural in rather frightening images, with Christ as Judge at the centre, taking Matthew's Gospel account, unique to Matthew, almost literally, in dividing humanity, over 300 muscular figures, the good and the just going up, to be welcomed by Mother Mary, Peter and John the Baptist, whilst the bad and evildoers are heading down the River Styx to Hades for eternal punishment. When I came here to Essendon, just over 3 years ago, the painting, in a rather heavy frame, was hanging over the bed in my bedroom. Fearing for my welfare and equilibrium, I replaced it with something lighter and brighter, less disturbing for my dreams too! There's no denying that Michelangelo's painting is a masterpiece, but it needn't be taken too literally, as he had a very fertile imagination!!

Hannah Arendt was a German born American Jewish political philosopher who wrote of the banality of evil and the human condition, trying to understand the horrors of the Holocaust, and how humanity could descend to the depths of such dark depravity. Prior to World War II, in 1929 she had completed her doctorate on St Augustine and love. Her writings were a warning against totalitarianism and dictatorship, and the need for checks and balances on power, still very much relevant to the world today, particularly where basic human needs and accompanying rights are denied by the strong and the nasty. She puzzled over how ordinary human beings, and perhaps particularly so called Christian and cultured people and nations could lose sight of our common humanity and dehumanize those who are perceived to be *different*, for whatever reason(s).

Today's Gospel takes the exact opposite perspective, looking at fundamental human needs as the basis on which individuals will be judged. In Catholic Tradition, the list of requirements for a good moral life are known as the *corporal works of mercy*, feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, and burying the dead, which is omitted here, but obviously an important human need as well, despite Jesus suggesting earlier on to 'leave the dead to bury the dead'! In the last 2 weeks, I have had 5 funerals, critical celebrations of life, and supporting grieving families and friends with carefully considered thoughts, words, rituals and prayers.

It's worth mentioning the follow-on from here too, with the 7 spiritual works of mercy, being to teach or instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to admonish the sinner, to bear wrongs with patience, to forgive offences willingly, to comfort the afflicted, and to pray for the living and the dead. So there's a bit overlap here, noting that Jesus' final words here, are focussed on the former, in simple and practical terms.

Scripture scholar Donald Senior CP puts it well: "*Fidelity to the love command – the heart of Jesus' teaching in Matthew – becomes the decisive criterion for divine judgement. Ultimately, Jew, Gentile and Christian are judged on the same basis... Matthew not only articulated a remarkable set of criteria for the ultimate judgement of the human person before God, but also gave encouragement to the missionaries of his own community, reminding them that the Risen Jesus was present with them, and that the authority of God's judgement ratified their missionary courage*", this in difficult and challenging times of change and growth, but occasional rejection and conflict as well. The love command of Jesus is at the centre, and response to human need, with mercy and compassion, where "*caring for the most vulnerable and marginalized is paramount*", concludes Brendan Byrne SJ.

And so we end Matthew's Year, with a clear and down to earth practical exhortation from Jesus, prior to his impending Passion and Death.

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*22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020*