34th Sunday in O.T. 2023 – The Feast of Christ the King.

Each of us, when we think of Jesus our Lord, have our own favourite image. In these coming weeks, the image of the child in the crib will be uppermost for many; others look to the crucifix, or see Jesus in a boat on a stormy sea, or sitting with his disciples at the Last Supper, some perhaps, prefer an image presented on an icon. In the apses of great Byzantine churches of Southern Europe, the Risen Lord is depicted as a dazzling and majestic figure, evoking the reverence and adoration of the beholder. But closer to home, a similar such magnificent image can be seen in the apse of church in Clonard Monastery.

It is this majestic image of the Risen Lord that today’s Gospel passage sets before us. It opens with solemn words, *“when the son of man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory.”* These words relate back to something Jesus had said a short time before*, “the Son of Man will appear in heaven; then too all the peoples of the earth will beat their breasts; and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Mt.24:30).*

While in today’s Gospel passage, Jesus is recognised by the messianic title, *“Son of Man”* as well as *“King”* and *“Good Shepherd,”* there is a particular emphasis on Jesus as *“Lord”* and *“Judge”* – *“he will separate men from one another, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats.”* Each Sunday, as we recite the Creed, in faith we proclaim, “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.” Contemplating Jesus taking his place on the seat of judgement serves to bring us to our senses and to our knees, because today’s Gospel is intentionally climactic - what is at stake is our winning or losing the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven!

The Gospel, having set a scene of apocalyptic grandeur, now graphically, sets out the criteria for judgement – and these contain some surprises. The first thing to note is that Jesus is using down to earth language focused on everyday living – his consideration of that which is right and wrong, good and evil, is related to nothing other than how we live our daily lives. We will be judged on how we treated our fellow human beings. There is nothing abstract in what Jesus says to us, he simply puts before us, with startling bluntness, the fact that our ordinary everyday living shows us who we really are.

The second surprise is that kindnesses done for *“one of the least”* is seen by Jesus as done to him. Jesus identifies himself with anyone in need. St Paul developed this understanding in his teaching on the Church as the “Body of Christ.” If one member of the body is hurting, the whole body is hurting. Stated bluntly, if we meet someone in need and decline to help, we are turning our back on Jesus. If we help we are helping Jesus. Taking to heart Jesus’ words, *“you did it to me,”* is particularly relevant this weekend as we respond as a Parish community to the St Vincent de Paul Appeal, and to the Parish One World Bread and Soup Lunch in the Parish Centre.

Another surprise found in today’s Gospel is that those on the king’s right and those on his left ask the same question, *“Lord, when did we see you”* in need? Behind this question lies an even more profound question – “Can the Lord be entirely sure that we mean it when we say that we love him?” The Gospel makes crystal clear that there is only one way in which we can demonstrate the authenticity of our love*, “in so far as you did it to one of the least, you did it to me.”* This is the challenge so neatly summarised by St. John, *“If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen”* *(1Jn.4:20).* Pope Francis insists, “always, in the face of those who suffer, we see the face of Jesus; in touching the wounds of our brothers and sisters, we touch the wounds of Jesus.

In Clonard Monastery, the image of the glorified Christ stretches out his arms in a gesture of welcome. Jesus will come at the end of time to judge all the nations, but he also comes to us every day, in so many ways, and asks us to welcome him. One of the saints reminds us, “At the end, we will be judged on love alone.”

*“Lord,*

*judge us by our hearts and not by our words,*

*and on that love which sees, and serves, you in others.”* **Amen.**