

*Matthew 25: 31 to 46    Ephesians 1: 15 to 23    Psalm 95: 1 to 7*

Have you ever watched any of those T.V. programmes where a team is sent to help someone whose home has become overwhelmed by their possessions? People become hoarders for all sorts of reasons and often need help and compassion to overcome their problem. Treasured mementos are kept, photos hung in prominent places so they can be seen; that furniture Gran left us- you know the sort of thing. But, when our living spaces are overtaken by clutter it can seriously affect the quality of our lives.

In the process of helping to clear out clutter, people are encouraged to go through their possessions. What happens is they uncover or rediscover things that are very precious to them and those things are kept and displayed properly when they move back into their house.

Things that are never used go to charities, to be used by those who need them, and other things are sold so that there's enough cash for a holiday or a special treat. People gradually get their lives back into order as they reorganise the living space around them. They can move on from things which have been exercising their minds - events in the past - so they can focus more on the present and the future.

Letting go is a good topic to consider on this feast of Christ the King, as today marks the end of the Christian year. Next week we start a new year - with Advent Sunday, leading us into Christmas- through Epiphany(Christ as a light to the nations), and on towards Easter.

Today's Gospel of the sheep and goats is not about us rushing around doing good works to earn a place In God's kingdom. Rather is it about Christ's judgment of how we have responded to the human needs we find around us. The Holy Spirit living within us leads us to recognise and proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, or King, in our lives- the one who is of real importance, the centre of all things.

For when we let go and see Christ as of central importance, then we are led naturally to feed the hungry, to give hospitality to strangers, to clothe the naked and to be alongside people in all kinds of difficulty.

This parable describes acts of mercy we can all do, every day. Such acts don't depend on wealth, ability, or intelligence; they are simple acts freely undertaken and freely received. We have no excuse to neglect those who have deep needs, and we cannot simply hand over responsibility to the church or the government.

Jesus demands our personal involvement in caring for other people's needs. Our responses will glorify God by reflecting our love for him. To treat everyone we meet as though they were Jesus is no easy task, but what we do for others shows what we really think about his words to us, and such love for others reflects our love for him.

Christ in us reaches out to Christ in others. It's not what we ourselves do but what Christ dwelling in us does. We are the body of Christ in this place and together as a body; a church with Christ as its head and, depending on the needs we find, we help to feed the hungry, to put roofs over people's heads, and we are alongside people who are in distress.

We may not feel that we are doing this as individuals, but we do it as church, and we're all involved in that. And, of course, it's not just what happens here either, but outside these walls, every day and in all places, Christ is powerfully at work.

But what sort of King is this, who is to be found in the poor, the weak, the prisoner, and the stranger? Yes, he is the King and reigns in glory; but this is a 'hidden' glory, veiled to those who live by the world's values.

He will be recognised only by those who know their own spiritual poverty and need, whose hearts and minds are open to receive him, in faith. However, the basic premise remains -uncomfortable but unavoidable- there will be division -not everyone will be interested, or prepared, to re-examine their priorities.

Even believers in Christ's promise of eternal life have to be constantly on their guard. Sometimes in the mess, the chaos, and the sheer busyness of our daily living, we forget that Christ within us is King over us, and that through His sacrifice for us, our present and our future with God is secure.

So maybe this is a good time for us to declutter our own souls - to discover again what is precious, special or holy. What needs to be carefully nurtured and enjoyed. So let's dispense with what we don't need, sort out those things in our lives which are holding back our faith - such as fears, problems from the past, prejudices, or misunderstandings- and, some of these need to be discarded.

If, through Advent, we can let go of some of this clutter, then we can prepare ourselves, with hands, hearts, and minds ready and eager to receive that greatest gift of all - Emmanuel, God with us, as King of our lives.