

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King

As we come to the end of the Church year, we visit the great judgment scene at the end of the Gospel according to Matthew. We've heard it before. Being one of the most important parts of the Gospel, we do well to listen again to allow its powerful message to sink deep into us. One day we will all appear before the risen Christ who will be our judge. What criteria will he use to judge our lives?

What may be surprising is that what concerns God the most is so down-to-earth. It's not just a general judgment based on our good and bad deeds. In today's Gospel reading we learn that responding to the basic needs of others is at the top of God's priority list. We should feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, cloth the naked, welcome the stranger, care for the sick, and visit those in prison – we've heard this before. But we can use a reminder. If Jesus were making this list today of what we should do, he might add: help the young with homework, and drive children to soccer practice. The point is that we are called to respond to the genuine needs of our neighbors, which surely includes our children.

A Gospel Word for the Home

Matthew 25:31-46

All of these caring actions mentioned in the Last Judgment include many of the acts of service that parents do every day. We devote much of our time and energy not just to feeding our children, but also to working hard to put food on the table. To infants and toddlers we are giving drink to the thirsty all through the day, and even into the night. We shop for their clothing. We welcome them as "strangers" and watch them change into "new persons" with each passing day. It's important to take the actions mentioned in the Gospel and see them from a family perspective.

And it's all recorded on our divine "account" automatically. We don't even have to think about it. When we do something needed by our children, or by anyone else for that matter, it's done for Jesus at the same time. It's like a two-for-one, or more accurately, a one-for-two.

This Gospel shows the intimate connection between love of God and love of neighbor. In fact, we cannot connect with God apart from our relationships with others. God dwells within all creation, which the church refers to as God's immanent presence. But there's even more. God resides in humankind, with us, and especially with the poor. We are invited to help each other however we can. Our help is like the life-blood of God's kingdom here on earth. It has many levels of meaning. On the surface, there's food given to the hungry along with all the other acts mentioned in Gospel according to Matthew for this Sunday. But at its deepest level, there is direct contact with God. Imagine that!

Parent Survival

The main point for this Sunday, and it's a wonderful idea, is that our ordinary actions of responding to the needs of others are not only important for those we help, they are also of great significance to our own spiritual life and for God. As parents, our spiritual life includes our parenting! That's our primary responsibility. That's where our relationship to God is built.

Why is this important to parents? There are many reasons. First, it underscores how important good parenting is. It brings our relationship to God right into the center of our lives. It also puts a human face on the presence of God and that face is our own and those of our children.

by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Car or Meal Talk

Take the idea "I was hungry and you gave me food" and talk with your children about what it means in terms of world hunger and about your own meals as a family.

One-Line Prayer

Dear God,
Help us to see you in those we help.
Amen.