THE SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

Many adult children learned to become useful before they learned how to receive care. Noticing what other people needed helped us stay connected or keep the household steady. Those skills can look generous in adulthood while turning service into another way of disappearing. The Solemnity of Christ the King invites us to look at mercy through a different lens.

Sunday's gospel reveals the King through people who are hungry, sick, imprisoned, and alone (Matthew 25:31–46). Those welcomed into the kingdom are surprised when Jesus says, *"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink."* They ask when they ever saw Him in need. He answers, *"Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me"* (Matthew 25:35, 40).

This teaching calls us to notice suffering without becoming responsible for everyone around us. Adult children can hear a command to serve and immediately assume that love requires saying yes, absorbing another person's distress, or neglecting our own limits. Christlike mercy is different from overfunctioning. It responds to real needs while respecting the dignity and responsibility of everyone involved.

Before we offer care, the first reading reminds us that God cares for us. He says, *"I myself will look after and tend my sheep"* (Ezekiel 34:11). That promise can be difficult to receive when we are accustomed to being the dependable one. Recovery teaches us that needing support does not make us weak or selfish. We are also sheep who need a Shepherd.

Many of us first experienced that care in a meeting where we did not have to perform. Someone listened without asking us to make the story easier for them. Someone else reminded us that our needs were not an inconvenience. Receiving that kind of attention can change the way we understand both service and belonging.

Step Ten helps keep this change honest. Continuing to take personal inventory means examining where we have caused harm, but it can also reveal when we have abandoned ourselves to avoid another person's disappointment. We may recognize that a resentful yes should have been an honest no. Promptly admitting what is true allows us to correct course before exhaustion hardens into anger.

This inventory also helps us notice where old family roles shape the way we serve. We can ask whether an act of care is freely offered or driven by fear that we will lose our place if we are not useful. The answer is not always obvious, so prayer and fellowship remain essential.

Mercy does not require us to return to harmful dynamics. We can recognize Christ in another person and still maintain a boundary. We can offer compassion without taking over their life. At times, the need Christ places before us is our own legitimate need for rest or support. Caring for that need can make us more available for service that is freely chosen rather than compelled.

The gospel also keeps service from becoming a performance. The righteous do not remember trying to impress the King. They responded to the person before them. Listening carefully to another adult child or welcoming someone who feels out of place can become a quiet encounter with Christ.

Christ the King does not measure our worth by how indispensable we become. He has already sought us, tended us, and given us a place in His flock. As recovery teaches us to receive care and offer it without abandoning ourselves, mercy becomes less about proving our goodness and more about recognizing our King in the needs He places before us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where do you notice service becoming a way to avoid your own needs or secure your place in a relationship?
- What has helped you receive care without feeling weak, selfish, or indebted?
- How has a healthy boundary or period of rest made your service more freely chosen and more loving?

MASS READINGS

FIRST READING Ezekiel 34:11–12, 15–17
RESP. PS. Psalm 23:1–2, 2–3, 5–6
SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 28
GOSPEL Matthew 25:31–46

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