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

Christ the King sounds like a feast of power and majesty. Yet Sunday's gospel introduces the King through people who are hungry, sick, imprisoned, and alone. Jesus tells us that the way we respond to them is the way we respond to Him. The final Sunday of the liturgical year asks not only whether we believe Christ is King, but whether we recognize Him when He comes without status, strength, or convenience.

In Sunday's gospel, the Son of Man separates the nations as a shepherd separates sheep from goats (Matthew 25:31–46). Those welcomed into the kingdom are surprised when He 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 such need. Jesus answers, *"Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me"* (Matthew 25:35, 40).

The surprise is important. These acts of mercy were not performed to build a spiritual résumé. The righteous responded to the person in front of them and later discovered that Christ had been present all along. Recovery can restore this kind of attention. Addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments narrow our world until nearly everything revolves around relief, fear, or self-protection. As grace opens our lives again, we become more capable of noticing someone else.

Before we serve, however, we remember that Christ first came looking for us. In the first reading, God says, *"I myself will look after and tend my sheep"* (Ezekiel 34:11). He seeks the lost and tends the injured. Many of us know what it is like to be found in a place of shame or confusion. Someone welcomed us into a meeting before we knew what to say or a sponsor stayed close when our own judgment could not be trusted. The care we receive becomes the pattern for the care we offer.

Step Ten helps keep us awake to this calling. Continuing to take personal inventory means examining more than our obvious wrongdoings. We can also ask where self-absorption has made us indifferent. Did we dismiss someone because their struggle seemed inconvenient? Did judgment keep us from listening? When we recognize that we have become cold or unavailable, Step Ten gives us a way to return quickly and repair what belongs to us.

This inventory can also reveal where we have reduced another person to a problem. Recovery gives us a shared language, but it should not make us quick to label or dismiss. The person who tests our patience still bears the image of God, and our response can either protect or reject that dignity.

Mercy does not mean rescuing everyone or removing consequences that may lead someone toward change. We are not the Savior in this story. Christ is the Shepherd and King. Our task is to respond faithfully to the need He places before us while respecting another person's dignity and responsibility. Healthy service offers presence without taking over.

This kind of service also protects recovery from becoming a private project of self-improvement. The grace we receive is meant to move outward. A newcomer may need someone to remember their name the next time they return. A person returning after relapse may need an honest welcome rather than suspicion. These ordinary responses can become places where Christ makes Himself known.

Recovery is not complete when we simply stop an addictive or compulsive behavior. Grace restores our capacity to be present and become useful to others. Christ has met us in our weakness, and He continues meeting us in the needs of others. When we notice, respond, and make room for someone who is suffering, we are not merely performing a good deed but encountering our King.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where has self-concern or judgment made it difficult for you to recognize Christ in someone who needed mercy?
- When has another person's compassion or steady presence helped you through a vulnerable season in recovery?
- What concrete act of mercy or Step Ten repair is Christ placing before you now?

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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