

Christ the King next before Advent

The last couple of years we have seen a rise in costs and energy and fuel and this has naturally made life a bit harder. For some it's particularly a struggle if on a low income and we've all felt the bite in some way or other. As we go into the winter and hear of the rise on the energy cap, we know it's not going to get any easier any time soon.

So not easy times we might say!

The more we think about it though we might challenge ourselves to think, 'what are easy times?' Most certainly times are better without deprivation or war, and our eyes remain on the dreadful state of things in Israel/Gaza and the Ukraine/Russia conflict as we look on helplessly. That said even the best of times are not all easy. Not easy for us and not easy for others. In truth there is always suffering and in prosperity there is always poverty. Recent events and happenings like Children in Need and ongoing food poverty with Foodbanks and other such charities, show that we can be very caring and charitable as human beings. Caring for others is quite a natural trait. Christians might want to think that care and mercy are part of the job description. Or faith description! That should certainly be the case, but I think most of us know we don't get it right all the time. We don't go as overboard as perhaps we should do in helping others because we're also concerned for ourselves and our own interests. There's something quite natural about that as well. The problem is when the 'self' takes precedence over the 'other.' Of course we care about our comfortability, but Jesus reminds us how we need to care and act on improving the comfortability of those who lack it so much.

In today's gospel from Matthew, Jesus in parable form talks about the separation of people before the Son of Man into sheep and goats. Sheep on his right hand and goats on his left. We have to bear in mind that the sheep would have been more valuable than the goats and thus the sheep were placed on the right hand, the place of honour. The parable continues. "Then the king will say to those at his right hand. 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'" The blessed are surprised at this and ask when it was that they cared for him when he was in need? The king who represents Jesus then answers. "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Jesus is trying to get the point across that our deeds, or lack of deeds as we hear when it comes to the goats on his left, don't go unnoticed. When we show mercy and care to the poor and the suffering we show it to Jesus. We can't relax on this, we have to be ready for Jesus and the way to be ready for Jesus is to live our lives for the good of others. This is a great challenge and is not easy. How often have we not 'helped' Jesus who identifies with the oppressed through his own crucifixion and death, because we didn't help those in need? It's often easier to hang on to what comfortability we have, because seeing to the comfortability of others, might make us leave some of what we treasure behind. But we will in fact find greater treasures in caring more for others, through whom we will find the greatest treasure of all.

I leave you with a short story about St Francis of Assisi written after his death by one of the friars who knew him.

'Among all the awful miseries of this world, Francis had a natural horror of lepers, and one day as he was riding his horse near Assisi he met a leper on the road. He felt terrified and revolted, but not wanting to transgress God's command and break the sacrament of his word, he dismounted from his horse to kiss him. As the leper stretched out his hand, expecting something, he received both money and a kiss. Francis immediately mounted his horse and although the field was wide open, without any obstructions, when he looked around he could not see the leper anywhere.'

Amen