

## **Feast of Christ the King: Youth Sunday - Fr Gerry O'Shaughnessy sdb**

26th November 2023

On this feast of Christ the King we are invited to look seriously at what true leadership looks like. I suppose that kings are a little bit out of date. But any of us who have grown up in recent times remember, especially as a child, the tales of the kings and King Arthur and all these wonderful people. Today, kings and queens tend to be merely a figurehead, a sign of a national loyalty, a reminder of history. They serve a different purpose today. So, when we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, we are celebrating the kings of the olden days. Kings at that time were given ultimate sovereignty, ultimate authority over people. What they said went. And if the fate of a person in front of a king was to beg for life over death, so great was their strength and power. And power - to be a king was to be powerful and this final parable in Matthew 25 shows us. However, as always Jesus turns the notion of what 'power' is on its head - Jesus sees that true power is seen in service and care of others.

Many of us involved in education are all too well aware of the OFSTED inspection agenda. Many are rightly critical of the all too easy 'tick box' mentality that such a regime can promote. The parable of the 'Last Judgement' has become known as the story of the 'Sheep and Goats' - it shows that our final 'inspection' is about what we do to support the hungry, thirsty, the sick, the ones who have nothing and even those in prison. St Teresa of Calcutta is the saint of care and compassion, especially in the most appalling conditions and she reminds us of the context of today's parable:

***"Many today are starving for ordinary bread But there is another kind of hunger, the hunger to be wanted, the hunger to be loved, the hunger to be recognised.***

***Nakedness too is not just the want of clothes, but also about loss of dignity, purity, and self-respect.***

***And homelessness is not just want of a house; there is the homelessness of being rejected, of being unwanted in a throwaway society.***

***The biggest disease in the world today is the feeling of being unwanted and uncared for.***

***The greatest evil in the world is lack of love, the terrible indifference towards one's neighbour.***

***Lord, warm our cold hearts with your grace, so that we your disciples may produce the fruits of love as you have taught us and with this love we shall overcome the world."***

Today is a call for the whole community to offer true leadership in their service of others. We are also given this day as 'Youth Sunday' and, as followers of Don Bosco, we need to celebrate our young people to the full. We are called and challenged to think this weekend as a parish community about not just what our young people can do for us but what we can do to welcome, encourage and empower our young people to feel like they belong. There is a danger that we see our youth just as the 'church of the

FUTURE' but they are part of the 'church of TODAY' too. What is your parish family doing to promote the gift of children and young people? How do you include their voice? I honestly believe that now is the time to ensure that each parish council has a young person on the board. Are we as adults ready to see beyond their perceived lack of experience and share their insights? As a governor in an inner city Sixth Form College, I was always in awe of our student governors and the solid contribution that they made. We need to trust our young people and recognise, admire clergy who find time in their busy and hectic schedules to visit their young people in schools. As we look to new priorities in the post pandemic Church, this pastoral support for the young is essential. If young people are not coming to your Church, you need to ask WHY? I firmly believe that our Catholic school network offers the British Church a unique opportunity to move forward in faith and service. Catholic Schools provide an incredible opportunity to help all young people grow, learn and become the people God made them to be. On this National Youth Sunday, we need to think about what we can do in our schools to make them vibrant, active and centered on Christ. For teaching me and so many others how to be kinder, compassionate and loving people. Schools are there to help children and young people to learn with a strong academic programme but they also exist for teaching us to be strong, and accept nothing less than a radical welcome. To be determined knowing that GOD is with us. We need to help our parishes to appreciate that if we keep putting down love and joy and hope, one day, it will be picked up. Schools are the central community of faith and place of worship for so many of our young people. Let us also thank all those adults who work in schools and who offer our children a true and living experience of what it is to be a true Christian community.

***The Church's educational institutions are undoubtedly a communal setting for accompaniment; they can offer guidance to many young people... In this way, the Church makes a fundamental contribution to the integral education of the young in various parts of the world.***

Christus Vivit (247)

These times of challenge have proved that we cannot be a Christian in isolation - today's parable reminds us of the need for solidarity. We need to be ready, just like the bridesmaids; we need to use our God - given talents in the SERVICE of others. As the King welcomes people home, so today may we ensure that welcome extends to our young people. Pope Francis reminds us that we are living in an exciting new era in the history Church to realise that we actually are 'better together'. The pandemic called us to experience a new type of being a community. While we need to learn from that, we also must move forward in a Church that actually listens to everyone. We have to ensure that current disputes in Ukraine and the Holy Land, do not cause a new pandemic of indifference. All of us, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, atheists, agnostics, and those who have yet to make up their minds, share this world. Each of us brings something to the table of unity. With the Holy Father, we work for that unity that can only be achieved by listening and dialogue:

***After many months we meet each other again our face to face, rather than screen to screen. Face to face. This is good! The current pandemic has***

***highlighted our interdependence: we are all linked to each other, for better or for worse. Therefore, to come out of this crisis better than before, we have to do so together; together, not alone. Together. Alone no, because it cannot be done. Either it is done together, or it is not done. We must do it together, all of us, in solidarity. I would like to underline this word today: solidarity.***

(Pope Francis 2 September 2020)

Please do not forget that today is a feast day; as a wonderful Jewish friend always reminds me: a feast involves more than just prayer and worship! Enjoy your cake, ice cream or special drink today.