

Homily for Christ the King



If you were asked what today's gospel is about you would have to say, 'Judgement'. Not a comfortable topic really.

It is no fun being judged nor it is easy to judge (done properly.)

Early days of being judged stick in my mind. Stood on the playground or football pitch knowing that you have no skills, are not fast, a bit podgy, cannot see too well, and not at all without your glasses, and the popular sporty lads are choosing the teams. You adjust to being one of the last one's standing waiting, but of course you get over it, or don't. Or on the rugby pitch are chosen to be cannonfodder for the 4th Fifteen team to boot about (there being no 5th Fifteen for us) though we took a sort of pride in being the cannonfodder team.

But then judging comes with its difficulties too. One or two stints at the Primary School judging the talent contest, 'Deanie's got Talent,' and you soon realise it is not just about talent, but there are a lot of other factors to consider if you are to escape the night unscathed (which is actually impossible.)

So a fair judgement on our lives, the sporty and unsporty, all of us equally, takes more than a human judge. It takes one who loves us, has the authority to do so (hence the name Christ the King as that was always a position of supreme authority in the old days), and it takes someone who can see us all as a whole, hence the title Universal too. Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King.

The criteria for judging at the talent contest are many, and not without bias. But in the gospel we see that Jesus' criteria are simple, in fact there is only one, How we treat each other?

Who is being judged in the gospel? Now this is not so clear. Not those on the list you might expect. Jesus is talking to Jews, Matthew was talking to a mainly once Jewish community of Christians. When Matthew uses the phrase 'all the nations' this has always referred, in his gospel, to those who were not Jews, the Gentiles. So those who are being judge are not those the listeners' would expect, or, with their own bias, even consider.

Matthew is challenging his own community and saying, ‘So, you might think you are all right, but what about Gentiles? Can they join us?’ And they would probably have a list as to why not. Why they do not want to let in others, who are not as they are. And that tends to be the nature of communities, they get very exclusive and closed.

But Jesus and Matthew have a simple message. There is one criteria for our community, even if you have never heard of Jesus. ‘How do you treat your fellow human beings?’ In the title of the feast day is the word ‘Universal,’ as we said. Christ is universal, as the hymn at the beginning of St. Paul’s letter to the Colossians says, written well before this gospel,

“for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth...all things were created through him and for him...and he holds all things in unity...Now the Church is his body and he is the head.”

The life of Christ runs through everything, everyone.

So, to Jesus and Matthew, judgement is through how much people see, sense, come to know and live by, that understanding that there is something that unifies us all, something (or Someone) who is good, and that has been the source of our shared creation and life, and who wishes us to be a full part of his future. If you discover a knowledge of this and live by it, even if you do not name it Christ or have a declared faith, then you have, in a different way discovered Christ, through others.

Our challenge, as Christians, is to live as a guide, a pathway for others to find this.

Richard Rohr once said that he no longer wants to build a community. He did once, in Ann Arbor I think, and then realised that once you create a community you create boundaries. Then sadly, who is in and who is out becomes a major topic for conversation.

On this last day of the Church’s year, the church throws down a gauntlet, challenging us to look at what our boundaries may be, how we see the criteria set for who is in the ‘Church’ and who is not. And a big question for us is, are our criteria more excluding than those of Jesus? That cannot be right.

As human beings of course we need guidance, because we are not ‘just judges’, we tend to be too biased. Left to ourselves we leave some standing on the playground looking at their feet. But we need to remember that Jesus is the judge and he has set the criteria, and they are embracing not excluding.