

Feast of Christ the King, 20/11/2011, Holy Trinity

Matthew 23:31-46

There are many people who speak and write about our living in a secular society.

The majority of our educational institutions, schools, universities, TAFE Colleges are secular institutions.

Major Christian festivals like Christmas and Easter have been taken over by consumerism with no mention of Christ in either advertising splurge.

If we listen to the advertising splurge it is consumerism that rules our lives.

We are told that we cannot live without this and that which is the very latest and best.

Yet on this last Sunday of the church year, we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King.

This reminds us that, in the midst of all the secularisation that we encounter on a daily basis, it is Christ who is "King of kings and Lord of lords."

The earliest Christian creed consisted of the words, "Jesus is Lord."

Remember that the first Christians were part of the Roman Empire and may well have said, "Jesus is Lord, not Caesar".

Throughout this church year we have followed Jesus' life and teaching through the writings of Matthew.

The Gospel reading for the last couple of Sundays has prepared us for to-day's reading.

There was the parable of the ten virgins with five who were wise and five who were foolish. It was about judgement in which the five foolish virgins were locked out because of their unpreparedness.

Then last Sunday the parable of the talents in which the lazy slave buried his one talent in the ground, produced it in tact at reckoning time, only to find that he was cast out with weeping and gnashing to teeth.

Now to-day's Gospel reading is very much a vision of the judgement day.

It is a kind of semi-parable with the introduction of animal images.

Jesus is depicted as the Son of Man.

It is a vision of the judgement of all nations.

It is a universal judgement.

It is not just a judgement of Israel or of the church.

It is not a case of pulling rank on judgement day.

It is not a matter of status: status or rank counts for nothing.

What counts is attitude and performance.

In the text we have “the least of these”; to whom does this refer?

Some biblical scholars argue that this refers to the early Christians, the Christians of Matthew’s community and the way in which they are treated by the Gentiles.

It is the attitude and performance of the Gentiles towards the Christians that determines their place on judgement day.

The reverse also applies.

It is the attitude and performance of the Christians towards the Gentiles and the Jews that determines their place on judgement day.

The criterion for caring is not whether a person is a Jew, a Christian, a Muslim, a Buddhist or Hindu or nothing, but whether or not there is a need.

Likewise, there is no distinction to be made of who should be the recipient of love.

Judgement for you and me and for everyone else will be by our fruit.

It will not be determined by our status or even our achievements but by our continued willingness to let the life of God be lived through us.

In other words, it will be determined by our love for people.

In our love for people we are participating in Christ’s love that has been shown throughout this church year.

This is the love of Christ the King who was born in a stable, ate with the outcasts of society, died on a cross, was raised from the dead but whose body still bore the wounds, a king who takes that wounded yet glorified body to heaven.

This is our story as we come to judgement according to the way we love. It is matter of attitude and performance.