

# A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

The Feast of Christ the King, Cycle A  
Ezekiel 34:11-12,15-17; 1Cor.15:20-26,28; Matt.25:31-46

***“Sunday’s gospel compares the final judgment to a shepherd separating sheep from goats. The shepherd distinguishes the sheep... by their merciful actions. This vision of final judgment is scarier than those that say the sun will grow dark and the stars fall from the sky. The terrible thing about the works of mercy is that any of us can do them but many of us neglect them.”***

***“This call to treat every other human being as Christ is at the root of Christian living.”***

These words of wisdom and caution were taken from a commentary written by Sr. Joan Mitchell writing for Sunday by Sunday.

This week’s reading in Matthew is as vividly and equally convicting. It teaches us that we must do six things if we want to be among the sheep whom the Shepherd leads into paradise and not among the goats whom he separates out. We must:

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give water to the thirsty
3. Welcome the stranger
4. Clothe the naked
5. Care for the sick
6. Visit the imprisoned

We have all heard this before. How convenient that it should be read at this season of the year! After all, we are planning Thanksgiving baskets! And Christmas is right around the corner. We can be wonderfully generous for two months in a row!

There's a catch. There always is when Jesus' message seems too simple. Notice that the faithful ones of the Gospel had no recollection of having served Jesus. Their efforts were in providing simple things, but their actions were completely uncalculating. They did not help others to earn their way to heaven. They helped because for them it was natural, instinctive and the response of a loving heart. If we knew for a fact that the marginalized person was really Jesus incognito we would help without question. The righteous of this story want to know when they saw Jesus! They didn't have a clue! If an act of generosity is done for prideful reasons, it is done for selfishness. They obviously did these works of mercy because it was just an expression of who they were. It was a natural byproduct of their inner goodness and their habit of giving.

So how do we move to the point where corporal works of mercy are so natural that they spring from our being almost unconsciously? It probably doesn't happen through holiday giving, but that is a place to start. When care and concern for the marginalized are everyday tasks, then the focus will change from holiday generosity which yields that feel-good-feeling to the kind of mercy and justice Jesus wants us to expect from ourselves each day.

Do you remember the story of the wise virgins and how it called us to make a habit of prayer, virtue, and acts of kindness? This is the same theme. Corporal works of mercy, random acts of kindness, must become habits in our everyday lives.

Let's look also at the message of Ezekiel. This prophet was taken into exile with the people of Israel at the time of the Babylonian captivity. He saw himself and the other people of God as scattered sheep and the Lord as the shepherd who would seek them and bring them home again. But the Lord also promises justice, for the fat and strong will be destroyed. The Shepherd alone will know those who have remained faithful and those who have benefited from the suffering of others.