

Solemnity of Christ the Universal King  
November 20, 2011

Ezekiel 34:11-13, 15-17  
1 Corinthians 15:20-26  
Matthew 25:31-46

Today's Gospel is open to different interpretations. I'm following the one, by John Meier, that sees Jesus announcing a general judgment for all humanity.<sup>1</sup> The passage follows, in Chapter 25 of Matthew, the parable of the ten virgins, which was the gospel last Monday, and the parable of the talents.

Jesus had already given some description of his final coming in the previous chapter: There comes first a time of desolation and tribulation; "Then," he says:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him." In this Gospel Jesus has been increasingly using this title, 'Son of Man,' to indicate his transcendent reality as Son of God. At the final moment he will appear "in his glory," as divine, accompanied by angels; he will sit upon *his* glorious throne. "Get it?" says Matthew.

"All the nations?" We cannot imagine millions, indeed billions of people in one space. Believe, God can work this out. There is a separation of sheep from goats, the blessed from the unblessed. He invites the blessed to come, inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The goats are commanded to depart from him, into the eternal fire. The reason for these commands is expressed by statements about behavior.

These words should continue to echo in our imaginations; "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me." Some people, downtown, in a group called SOME, do this very thing, every day.

In the gospel story, each group expresses great surprise at these statements. The king replies, "Amen, I say to you whatever you did for one of these least brothers [and we can add sisters] of mine, you did for me,"

Allow me now to quote Meier's explanation of these words:

Jesus has fully identified himself with the poor and outcast and oppressed. Jesus is indeed Emanuel, God-with-us. He is with his people, the church, but he is most especially with the no accounts of this world, all those in desperate need of the basic necessities of life. The Son of Man, the crucified king who judges all people, is encountered in every one who suffers. His association with the poor in the beatitudes and in his healing activity is broadened here to cosmic scope.<sup>2</sup>

“Cosmic scope?” I reflect: doesn’t that apply to you and me as well? Is not each of us “poor” in one respect or another?

Are we not each called to love one another with generous patient love, a love the Holy Spirit can give us if we ask?

“The Son of Man, the crucified king who judges all people,” is encountered in ourselves and all we meet.

Fr. Hilary Hayden

1 John P. Meier. “Matthew,” (Collegeville Minn., The Liturgical Press, 1990).

2 Ibid., 304