

## A VISION AND AN ACTION PLAN

Imagine a teacher who, well before a test, tells you what the questions will be. That's what Jesus does in today's gospel. St. John of the Cross said, *In the evening of life you will be examined in love*. That's the test and Jesus tells us what it's going to be about. He is a different king with a different type of kingdom.

Jesus gives us six categories: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the ill and visiting the imprisoned. Over time, a seventh emerged, burying the dead. These make up what we call the corporal, the physical works of mercy.

There are also spiritual works of mercy: counseling the doubtful, instructing the ignorant, admonishing the sinner, comforting the sorrowful, forgiving injuries, bearing wrongs patiently and praying for the living and the dead.

More broadly Jesus gives us *a vision and an action plan*. Let's start with the action plan, it involves reaching out beyond ourselves. This action plan goes beyond six categories and points to a way of life. I like to think it can include telling a joke to cheer up someone who is sad. It calls us to get up and do something, to reach out to others, particularly those in need. It calls us to have eyes open to see, hearts open to love and hands open to serve.

It's always important to pay attention to what Jesus says but it's also important to pay attention to what he doesn't say. Jesus doesn't say we have to solve world hunger but he does say we're to feed the hungry.

Underlying this action plan is a vision, a deep, beautiful and challenging vision. It's not just being kind and compassionate to others, although kindness and compassion are very important. It's deeper than that. It's an incarnational, that is to say, an enfleshed vision, as well as a Christ-centered vision. In all these events, we're not just giving food to someone who is hungry, we're giving to Jesus, we're seeking to see and serve Jesus in others.

The Second Vatican Council taught, *In the voices of the poor Christ himself can be heard, crying out for charity from his followers.* When Christ cries out, what do we do? Our response or lack of response is important and as Jesus reminds us, it has eternal consequences. Divine judgement is simply confirmation of decisions we have already made.

Again, pay attention to what Jesus says and doesn't say. He doesn't say, *It's as if* you did it for me but rather, *You did it for me.* So it's not *like* we're doing something for him; rather we *are* doing something *for him.*

Christ is present when people gather in his name; in those who minister in his name and in his word. And he is present in the Eucharist under the form of bread and wine. We call this the real presence of Christ not because the other ways aren't real but because this is a continuous, abiding presence.

This gospel reminds us of another way Christ is present—in those who are in need. The same Jesus who says, *This is my body,* is the same Jesus who says, *I was hungry and you gave me food.*

This plays out in our daily lives at home, at work or wherever we may be. I tell those in health care that while priests see, serve and touch Christ under the form of bread and wine, they can see, serve and even touch Christ in the sick. Teachers serve Christ by instruction as ignorance is a species of poverty. Those who work in the finance industry, as I used to do, are helping people take care of their families. Those in law seek to protect people.

Anyone laboring in a worthwhile profession can serve Christ in that work. One author goes so far as to say that parents who sit down and play with their children are playing with the Christ Child. You could even say that husbands and wives in ministering *to* each other are ministering to Christ *in* each other. To take care of a loved one with dementia can be a call to see the suffering Christ in that person.

This is a different vision of a very different king. Seeing Christ in our neighbor, particularly in our neighbor who is in need, is *challenging* but it is also *freeing* and *beautiful.* It is *challenging* because it does not allow us to keep God cooped up in a church and because it demands of us to give of ourselves to others. It is *freeing* because this caring about others, this loving our neighbor, leads us out

of the prison of our own ego and it's life giving. And it is *beautiful* because it can lead us to realize how close Jesus is to us and how we can see, serve and touch him today. Jesus can be as close as the person next to you. It is beautiful because at the end of a day, we can look back and see how we may have served Christ in others.

A priest was once visiting with Mother Teresa about her spirituality and mission. At the end she asked him to put out his hand and touching his fingers one at a time she summed up an action plan and vision saying, *You did it for me.*

Encouraged by one another, informed by the word of God, strengthened by prayer and nourished by the Eucharist we now celebrate, with lives of intentional faith, may we follow this different type of king into his different type of kingdom embracing his *vision* and carrying out his *action plan*, remembering those words, *You did it for me.*