

## Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe – A

When Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected Pope in 2013 there were many stories told about him during his years as the Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires in Argentina. How he lived in an apartment and not in the ornate Cardinal's residence. How he went to work each day traveling on a city bus instead of in a chauffeured limousine. How he made frequent visits into the barrio or ghetto of Buenos Aires to minister to the poor.

Not much changed after he became pope. He now lives in a Vatican apartment instead of in the apostolic palace, he rides around in a Ford Focus and on his first Holy Thursday washed the feet of 10 young men and two young women in a prison in Rome. A couple of them were not even Catholic!

In living this way Pope Francis is attempting to be the type of shepherd mentioned in the first reading, one who tends his sheep and rather than neglecting them. Perhaps he is also trying to teach us that we need to pay attention to the needs of the poor rather than living in big houses and driving expensive cars?

We all know the double commandment taught by Christ, that we must love God and our neighbor. A broad definition of neighbor is anyone in need. The gospel gives us a list of such people: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the ill, and those in prison. What Jesus says about these people is that whatever we do for them we do for him as well. Mother Teresa of Calcutta understood this as she ministered to the dying of that city. She once said that she saw Christ in them.

Jesus challenges us in the gospel when he tell us that those who help the needy will go off to eternal life while those who ignore the needy will go off to eternal punishment. Is Jesus serious here? Does our salvation really depend upon how we respond to the needy?

Let us take an example from life here in the Cedar Rapids area. It is rather common to find homeless people begging for money at various intersections. I sometimes give them money, I sometimes don't give them money depending on how legitimate I think that they are. A month or so ago Pope Francis made the statement that we should always give something to those who are begging and not judge their motives. Perhaps the Pope sees Christ in them more than I do?

The parish is always offering opportunities to help those in need. For example, just down the window walk you will find the Advent Giving Tree which collects items for needy families. Take a mitten from the tree and discover a need that you can meet. In a couple of week the parish will also be hosting a refugee family who will have many needs for us to meet.

I would like to share a story with you written by Loren Eisley that may help us in our reflection on the gospel story. One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, "What are you doing?" The youth replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they will die." "Son," the man said, "Don't you realize that there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make a difference" After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said, "I made a difference for that one."

Are you willing to make a difference for someone in need? And by the way... I do believe that my salvation depends on how I respond to the needy.