

## Second Last Sunday

*“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me. Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.”*

Did you ever wonder just what does Jesus looks like? -- Is He bearded? What color are His eyes? Hair? Skin? What is His height and weight?

Your mind's eye can conjure up pictures of a dozen artistic renditions...

...but, in the end, it is only idle curiosity—there is no real reason to know.

But today, in the Gospel, you are confronted with the question in a way which goes far beyond this idle curiosity.

Today, you need to know because your eternal life depends upon it.

You are here today because you want Jesus to say to you on the last day, *“I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.”*

In light of this, the question, *“When did we see You?”* is not idle curiosity.

Its answer is startling: *“Whatsoever you did to the least of these, you did it to Me.”*

When you stand before the judgment seat of Christ, Jesus will be wearing the face of all those whom you encountered in your life.

These are the forms and faces that He wears when He encounters you every day.

If you want to serve Jesus, you are not to wait until you see someone who looks like a Richard Hook painting or a Rembrant sketch or even a Durer woodcut.

You see and serve him in the face of your children or parents...your neighbor and fellow worker...your husband or wife...your friend or enemy.

The hungry and thirsty Jesus is the hungry and thirsty one whom **you** encounter --not the one who is hungry elsewhere!

Likewise with the sick, the naked, the imprisoned and the stranger.

Here Jesus speaks of all the ordinary people that you come across in every day life.

People who need to be fed, obeyed, loved, supported, helped and visited.

When Jesus comes to judge the quick and the dead, He will ask: "how did you treat Me when I came to you in these, My brethren?"

What will you answer to Him in that day? *Can you answer that you have treated Him as He should be treated?*

What will you say when Jesus asks you for an answer, “Why not?”

Will you have the gall to answer with the same excuses that you consider in your heart today when you are denying your love to others?

Will you tell Him: “You didn’t treat me well enough to deserve my kindness.” or, “I got tired of doing nice things for you because you never do nice things for me.”

These excuses, which might sound convincing at the moment, are embarrassingly feeble in the light of day.

How could you answer this way to the Lord Jesus who has done everything for you!

So maybe you'll say: “I didn't know it was you, or I'd have treated you differently.”

But the plain words of today's Gospel cut off that escape route. *“inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me”*

With both of these excuses taken away from you, the truth is all that remains:

“I didn’t believe. I didn’t believe You when you said, *“whatever you have done to the least of these, you have done to Me.”*”

Every time you withhold kindness, love, and care from those whom Christ has put into your life, you show unbelief and prove Christ to be just in His judgment.

When He judges you for these things, and says, *“Depart from Me you cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels—when He thus bans you from the Kingdom of heaven for these offenses, He is right and true.*

When Jesus comes on the clouds to judge, no one could escape this sentence.

Therefore, in love for you--the least of His brethren--He first came not on the clouds but on the cross; not as the one who **judges** but as the one who **is judged**.

There, God's only-begotten Son was numbered with the goats--on the left.

There was the day of judgment where sin was confronted and justly punished.

There God forsook Him and banned Him from the Kingdom of God.

Christ was not judged because of His own offenses but for yours.

And in Christ’s bitter suffering and death, your sin was fully and justly punished.

Christ stood before the face of the righteous Judge that He might now stand before you and show you His gracious face.

This is the gracious face that He shows in His church.

It is not the hungry face that He shows you in the face of those around you.

Both are the face of the same Christ, but one is the face of Law the other Gospel.

In your day-to-day life, He comes only in order that you might serve Him.

But today, and in this place, He comes in order that He might serve you.

Here, today, by speaking to you does everything for you that He elsewhere asks you to do for Him.

You come into the church hungry and Christ prepares a table before you feeding you His own body. You come thirsty and He gives you to drink of His own blood.

You come as a stranger to God and an alien and He takes you in and treats you as the very son of the Father—even making you fellow heirs with Him.

You come naked and exposed with your shame uncovered and He places on you a glorious robe washed white and befitting of the saints of God.

You come sick and Christ comes to you with the medicine of eternal life to make you well and whole.

You come as a prisoner of Satan fast bound in chains and oppressed and Christ shatters those chains by His Holy Absolution.

All this you receive here from the very face and mouth of Christ from His hands which are present in the Church and in Her means of grace.

Out in your every day life, Christ’s appearance to you is one of demanding, but here, it is only one of giving.

Those who steadfastly refuse to recognize Christ’s face in their neighbor He also prohibits from seeing His face in Church.

And those who do not see Christ’s Gospel face in the church — on this judgment day will not see it at the last day either.

But for you here, who behold Christ’s Gospel face today, and receive the gifts which He here gives, you will also be blessed to hear those words on the last day, *“Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”* That is your certain hope. AMEN.