The Holy See

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, which closes the liturgical year, the great parable that unfolds the mystery of Christ: the entire liturgical year. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of history; and today's liturgy focuses on the "Omega", that is, on the final goal. The meaning of history is understood by keeping its culmination before our eyes: *the goal* is also *the end*. And this is precisely what Matthew accomplishes in this Sunday's Gospel (25:31-46), placing Jesus' discourse on the *universal judgement* at the end of his earthly life: He, the one whom men are about to condemn is, in reality, the supreme judge. In his death and resurrection, Jesus will manifest himself as the Lord of History, the King of the Universe, the Judge of all. But the Christian paradox is that the Judge is not vested in the fearful trappings of royalty, but is the shepherd filled with meekness and mercy.

In fact, in this parable of the final judgement, Jesus uses the image of a shepherd, recalling images of the prophet Ezekiel who had spoken of God's intervention in favour of his people against the evil shepherds of Israel (cf. 34:1-10). They had been cruel exploiters, preferring to feed themselves rather than the flock; therefore, God himself promises to personally take care of his flock, defending it from injustice and abuse. This promise God made to his people is fully accomplished in Jesus Christ, the Shepherd. He is indeed the Good Shepherd. He too says of himself: "I am the good shepherd" (*Jn* 10:11, 14).

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus *identifies himself* not only with the king-shepherd, but also *with the lost sheep*, we can speak of a "double identity": the king-shepherd, Jesus identifies also with the sheep: that is, with the least and most needy of his brothers and sisters. And he thus indicates the criterion of the judgement: it will be made on the basis of concrete love given or denied to these persons, because he himself, the judge, is present in each one of them. He is the judge. He is God-Man, but he is also the poor one. He is hidden and present in the person of the poor people that he mentions right there. Jesus says: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it (or did it not) to one of

the least of these my brethren, you did it (you did it not) to me" (cf. vv. 40, 45). We will be judged on love. The judgement will be on love, not on feelings, no: we will be judged on works, on compassion that becomes nearness and kind help. Do I draw near to Jesus present in the persons of the sick, the poor, the suffering, the imprisoned, of those who hunger and thirst for justice? Do I draw near to Jesus present there? This is the question for today.

Therefore, at the end of the world, the Lord will inspect the flock, and he will do so not only *from the perspective of the shepherd*, but also from the *perspective of the sheep*, with whom he has identified. And he will ask us: "Were you a little bit like a shepherd as myself?" "Were you a shepherd to me who was present in those people who were in need, or were you indifferent?". Brothers and sisters, let us look at the logic of indifference, of those who come to mind immediately. Looking away when we see a problem. Let us remember the parable of the Good Samaritan. That poor man, wounded by the brigands, thrown to the ground, between life and death, was there alone. A priest passed by, saw, and went on his way. He looked the other way. A Levite passed by, saw and looked the other way. Before my brothers and sisters in need, am I indifferent like this priest, like this Levite and look the other way? I will be judged on this: on how I drew near, how I looked on Jesus present in those in need. This is the logic, and it is not I who is saying this: Jesus says it. "What you did to that person and that person and that person, you did it to me. And what you did not do to that person and that person and that person, you did not do it to me, because I was there". May Jesus teach us this logic, this logic of being close, of drawing near to him, with love, in the person who is suffering most.

Let us ask the Virgin Mary to teach us to *reign* by *serving*. Our Lady, assumed into Heaven, received the royal crown from her son because she followed him faithfully — she is the first disciple — on the way of Love. Let us learn from her to enter God's Kingdom as of now through the door of humble and generous service. And let us return home only with this phrase: "I was present there. Thank you!". Or: "You forgot about me".

After the Angelus, the Holy Father continued:

I would like to send a special thought to the populations of Campania and Basilicata 40 years after the disastrous earthquake whose epicentre was in Irpinia and which sowed death and destruction. Forty years already. That dramatic event, whose wounds, even the material ones, have not yet entirely healed, highlighted the generosity and solidarity of the Italian people. Testimony of this are the many twinnings between the towns where the earthquakes took place and those of northern and central Italy, whose bonds still endure. These initiatives have favoured the difficult journey of reconstruction, and above all fraternity among the various communities of the Peninsula.

I greet you all, people of Rome and pilgrims who, notwithstanding the current difficulties and always respecting the rules, have come to Saint Peter's Square. A special greeting to the families

who are struggling more in this period. Regarding this, think of the many families who find themselves in difficulty in this moment, because they do not have work, they have lost their job, they have one or two children.... And at times, with a bit of shame, they do not let people know about this. But may you be the ones who go and seek where there is need. Where Jesus is, where Jesus is in need. Do this!

I wish everyone a happy Sunday — also to those of the Immacolata, who are great. And please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch. *Arrivederci*!