

One of the challenges set before us today in the gospel is to see the face of Christ in those who are suffering in any way. This is a very difficult concept to those who are not Christian.

Most people have generous hearts. It's human kindness, and perhaps solidarity, people of a generous heart and disposition who contribute all year round to charities, Children in Need, Comic Relief etc.

But we as Christians are called to something deeper. Christ has told us that when we recognise him in our midst in those who suffer we are indeed blessed. We act in this way because we are ambassadors of the kingdom. The values we hold dear drive us on because this is what we are called to do. There is no other way for us as Christians but to reach out to those in need.

It's often said the most generous people are those who know what it means to suffer. Having experienced hardship, we are more keenly tuned in to the suffering of others. So often, whether it's grief or loss, you hear people, say so and so knew what I was going through because they had been through it. Often without words that shared bond comes through.

Like the people in the gospel, it should be part of our DNA. People often remark on how generous this Parish is, and it is true. Charity is not an add-on, but a requirement of discipleship. It is very much part of our Catholic communities' ethos, and certainly of this parish.

The people who did not help others in the gospel didn't go out to do those in need any harm, they simply didn't see them or want to see them. We need to have our eyes wide open to see the suffering around us, and pray for the courage to act. Mother Theresa once said, you must love until it hurts. Not turning away, seeing the reality, hurts, because we are lovers of humanity and feel the pain of our brothers and sisters.

Today we will have once again the chance to help those suffering in the Holy Land. No matter what the causes and the politics, there are people going hungry, thirsty, without shelter or proper health care, who simply want to live. Our response is not political, but recognising our shared humanity, we are all brothers and sisters.

In the gospel, St. Matthew has the King say, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world."

The fact that we are able to help those most in need means that we are blessed, but we are blessed because we are living the life of faith with the values of the kingdom. A kingdom life not just here and now, but in the life to come.