Every human being bears the image and likeness of God. That's what *makes* us truly human. Without it, we lose our humanity. When the Son of God became man, in a certain way He united Himself with every human being. He enhanced further the image of God in us. He ennobled our humanity in its very essence, at its very core. That is why, whatever we do to one another, we do to Him. That's not just a manner of speaking. It is the truth.

But He is in each of us *incognito*. We don't see Him. We struggle sometimes to *perceive* Him in ourselves, never mind in one another, even with the eyes of faith. The "sheep and the goats" of the parable all respond to the King, "Lord, when did we see *you* hungry, thirsty, etc.?" They are taken aback, amazed even, that He would identify Himself with their neighbour and, yes, with themselves.

It is good for us each to stop and ponder from time to time that Christ is also present in *me*. When I see my face in the mirror, can I look behind it to see Christ in me? For I, too, am created in the image and likeness of God. He became one with me, too, in His incarnation. As the motto of Pope Leo puts it: *we are all one in that One,* meaning Christ.

This is already true at our conception to this natural life. It becomes even truer at our re-conception to eternal life in baptism. It takes on its most sublime form on this earth when we are one with Him and with one another in the Eucharist. We become one Body, one Spirit in Christ.

As Jesus puts it elsewhere, we are rooted in Him, the True Vine. We are His branches. This is a metaphor, but it speaks to the reality of our deepest being as individuals and as a race. Being a Christian is intended to bring our humanity to its fullest expression. That can never take place in isolation, but only in communion. Being Christian is not a

label: it's more like a new DNA. I don't, I can't exist independently of Christ, as if I had my own private identity aside from Him. Christ lives in me *because* He gives me life.

While this is true most especially through baptism, it is also true for every human being, including those who say they don't believe in Him. Christ's presence in me is not conditioned by my belief in Him. He doesn't need my permission to live in me, to love me, to love through me. He just does. He is sovereign over our humanity. He is our King.

So true is this that, even if I don't know or recognise or believe in Him, how I treat Him in my neighbour is the measure of who I am myself judged to be when I come before Him in death. I am blessed or cursed on how my practical love and care for my neighbour has been lived out, or not, *because* Christ unites Himself with each and with all.

In the ancient middle East, the King was seen as the image of God on earth. Christ the King is that perfect image, but He is so *in and with us*, His royal people. It's an image which we tarnish when we do not love and serve one another. We can even distort and deform it radically by rejecting love altogether. If we do that, we deny our true selves, we transform the blessing of who we are into a curse. Christ will not recognize us.

So, our crown in heaven will be the diadem of our selfless love; on earth, we wear it when we show forth the image of Christ in all we are, have and do, especially in regard to the least of our brethren. We will be the more truly human the more we are truly Christian; and, if faithful, we will, at the last, reign with God in the Kingdom of the blessed.