“And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’” *Matthew 25:40*

The Last Judgement in the Gospel of Matthew is both one of the most well-known and unsettling passages of scripture. Jesus clearly lays out the expected behaviors of believers. Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, take care of the sick and visit the imprisoned. These six tasks are straightforward, but not always simple.

Sculptor Timothy P. Schmalz expresses this challenge Christ offers in Matthew 25 in three dimensions. His life-size bronze statues depict Jesus as he calls us to see him: homeless, stranger, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and imprisoned. In each, the face of Christ is obscured in a drape of cloth or bent elbow and Jesus is known only by the wounds of the crucifixion. Across the world, these works have scandalized and challenged the communities in which they are installed. In North Carolina and Indiana, police and paramedics were called to respond to homeless Jesus. The statues have been critiqued as insulting, demeaning, creepy and even sacrilegious. And yet, why should they surprise us since in Matthew 25 Jesus promised that in the least of these is where we would see him and answer our call to serve him.

Joeann Karibo explains this call succinctly in her reflection on *A Shared Statement of Identify for the Catholic Health Ministry*. “For the members of the Catholic health ministry, creating an option for the poor cannot simply be providing charity care to those who come to our health facilities in crisis and without the financial means to pay for needed services. A true option for the poor requires a commitment to mobilize and nurture the growth of individual and community capabilities and to create opportunity for each individual to assume a meaningful role in defining and pursuing holistic well-being, peace and hope.”

When asked about the shock and outrage of some, Tim Schmalz reminds us the art “is only as shocking as the Gospels are. It’s just a representation.”

God has always strongly identified with the poor and vulnerable. He chose a wandering nomad, the smallest nation and an insignificant teenage girl. Jesus was poor, homeless and vulnerable. This has deep implications for our call as individuals and as health care ministries. Jesus told us where to find him and we must seek to serve him in those people and places.
Reflection for the Second Week of Lent

For Reflection

The Apostle James writes, “If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is that?” James 2:15-16

- Do I / we see the face of Christ in people who are poor and vulnerable?
- Do I / we participate in opportunities to serve the poor and vulnerable inside or outside of our workplace?
- Do I / we participate in community building activities and efforts to address the social determinants of health?
- Do I / we care for the poor and vulnerable among our associates?

Prayer

Let us pray together,

God of All People, scripture bears witness to your special love of those who are poor and vulnerable. In Jesus you align yourself forever with those in need and at the margins. As we serve them, let us see your face. Move us to act on behalf of those in need and bless our actions to be a leaven in our community. In this season of reflection and prayer, give us the graces we need to more fully follow you and become who we claim to be in your name. Amen.