

In Nomine Iesu

The 2nd Last Sunday after Trinity 2022

Are you ready to inherit the kingdom prepared for you? – Matthew 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for 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; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’ Then He will say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘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.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Judge of all on the Last Day. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

Are you ready to inherit the kingdom of heaven? Are you ready to stand before Christ for judgment? Are you ready to face God and hear His judgment, the final judgment, pronounced on you as eternity looms before you? Are you ready to be placed on His right or the left? With His sheep or with the goats? Let us consider this question.

I

Did you know that the Passover lamb didn't have to be a lamb? Exodus 12:5 clearly says that it “shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.” From the goats? Yes, Israel could take a Passover lamb from the goats or the sheep. In fact, whenever a “flock” is mentioned in the Old Testament, it is almost always a mixed one, sheep and goats together. But the picture we see today is a very different one. It is not a mixed flock. Sheep are placed on one side, goats on the other. What is more, they'll never be mixed again. For the difference between them goes beyond appearance. Sheep see things differently. They think differently than goats. And the two believe differently, even if they cannot see their differences. But the Judge who separates them one from the other, knows why they are separated. That is why He must show **them** why He divides them.

He will show those on His right why they are to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

So, the sheep are told of the wonderful, holy, good works they did. They are shocked to be credited for such good works. They cannot remember doing such deeds. The goats are shocked also. They thought they had done enough such deeds. Both groups protest.

The sheep ask, “When did we see You hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give You a drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?” Yes, they could have asked, “When did we even see You?” The answer would be, “No, you didn’t. But I was there.” The goats advance the same sort of inquiry. They ask: “When did we fail? When didn’t we help you? Had we known You were around, we would have served You. Look at all our other works, our acts of mercy, and judge us by them.” As they ask, so they receive. They are judged by their deeds. As good and generous as their works might have been, whether they built libraries, hospitals, orphanages, dedicated their lives to serve their neighbors or not, they still fall short. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. For you see, Judgment Day will be about **God’s judgment, not ours.**

Consider, when we are criticized about our motives, our actions, what do we do? We defend ourselves. And we see the same behavior in others. If someone just hints that we have not done right or well, we defend ourselves. But when we’re alone, in the disturbing quiet of our own heart and mind, our conscience alternately accuses and excuses us, just as the Apostle Paul said, and the conflict within us is revealed. We know what is good. We want to do good. And sometimes we do ... but often we don’t. But the truth is that everyone falls short of God’s perfect glory. You know this. Your conscience accuses you, and later excuses you. Each one’s conscience demonstrates humanity’s conflicted and troubled state, our inability to live up to our own ideals, much less God’s ideals.

Our hearts left to themselves can only ask, “Have I done enough? I’ve helped people. I’ve put money in the bucket outside the store at Christmas. I’ve called in to the telethon and responded to the plea on the phone. I’ve volunteered, held the door open for those who needed help, and even turned out to do my civic duty in many ways. I’ve given to the Church, probably more than to anywhere else. I’ve desired the Gospel be preached not just here but all over the world. I’ve wanted the children catechized, the sick visited, prayers offered for community, nation and world. But have I done enough? Have I been perfect in every way, selfless at all times, without envy, pride or malice? Have I given without thought of recognition or reward? When I ask myself such questions, what is the result? It depends on the circumstance. We may say yes. We may even think yes. But then, alone in our homes, in our thoughts, perhaps in the night, our consciences accuse, and then excuse, accuse and excuse. And all we have left is uncertainty.

II

But God has used you for good. He has provided for others by your hands. In mercy He caused you to will and to do His good pleasure; and His good pleasure has worked good for others through you. But you are still uncertain. You are told that you are a saint by the grace of God, washed clean with water and Spirit in Holy Baptism, that you cling to the Word of Life as it has been delivered to you. And yet, at the same time you struggle with sin, are torn by temptation, beset with doubt and worry, thinking too much and too often about yourselves and, probably, what others think, trying to maintain appearances, trying, dare we say, not to look like a goat, but like a sheep of the Good Shepherd.

Dear friends, stop it! Just stop it. Turn from your deeds and works, and look to Christ, the Good Shepherd and the Savior of your soul. Look to Christ, not the **Judge**, but the **Good Shepherd**. He truly is good and **His mercy endures forever**. Be judged not by your works and deeds, which on their own merit always fail. Be judged instead by His His mercy, His perfect life, His keeping of the Law, His satisfaction of God’s wrath and judgment, and His victory over sin, death, and hell. He, unlike you, loved God perfectly, and His every neighbor too. What He has done, He has done for you and for all men,

what He has done in service to His Father, counts as your doing. It counts as your work. He took what is yours: sin, death, guilt, and, in exchange for all that, He gives you what is rightly His: innocence, righteousness, holiness, and the right to enter heaven. Face the law, and all that justice demands in the holy cross of Jesus Christ, who there suffered hell to save you. Let it accuse you, rightly, correctly. But then trust in His goodness and mercy, and be not afraid. He has faced all that accuses you, pled guilty to every charge in your place, and paid the price of your redemption.

Look to His deeds, not yours. That is why the sheep have no recollection of their good deeds. When did they see Jesus hungry and feed Him, or thirsty and give Him drink? When did they see Him and help in any way? When they did it to one of the least of His brothers. When was that? When they dropped a dollar in the bucket? When they put still more in the collection plate? To a degree, yes. For God does work through His people throughout the time He gives them on earth before the darkness comes when no one can work, through all the abilities and experiences He has apportioned to each for the good of all, through the gifts and wealth He has given so unequally, yet so richly and wisely, to all. God works through His people, as through instruments, to bring His grace and love to a world so desperately in need of them. But more significantly, the sheep of His pasture did all these good things, when Jesus the Christ did it for and through them. He provided for Israel in the desert with manna and fresh, sweet water. He clothed Adam and Eve in their sin. He forgave the woman caught in adultery and the naked, raving lunatic who roamed the graveyards east of the Sea of Galilee. He welcomed Zacchaeus and Matthew, Mary Magdalene and the Samaritan woman. He visited Paul in prison. He healed the sick through His own hands and, later, through the hands of the apostles. He performed every good work, and transferred all the credit to your account. He did it for His bride, the Church, to present Her pure and radiant to His Father. He did it to show the power of love to redeem and to save the lost. He did it for you, and for me.

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Dear friends, what you do with all the good gifts God has given you is important, as today's Gospel makes clear. Through what God has given you, when He moves you to give of yourself, people are helped. And so, Christ our Lord is served. This is most certainly true. But the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ will come like a thief in the night, and you, on your own, will not have done enough. But He has more than enough.

Are you ready to inherit the kingdom of heaven? **You are when you trust Him**, and not yourself. He will come as a thief in the night, even as He said. But He does so to steal you away from the prince of this fallen world, who is convinced that he has you in his grip, and will be able to drag you down to his dark kingdom. The Good Shepherd will steal you from him, and place you on His right hand, and there show forth your perfect righteousness to all the creation. What He will say about you will make you gasp in shock and disbelief, you and everyone else, be they sheep or goats. He will demonstrate to all that you are His beloved, that there is no one and no way to raise objection to this marriage of the Lamb to His bride the Church. What a glorious day it will be. So, dear conflicted sinner, dear accused and excused, believe Him, and so be ready. Say with longing in your heart, "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly. In You alone I trust." Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria