

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
NOVEMBER 26, 2023
LAST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME:
SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE KING**

SCRIPTURES:

Ezekiel 34:11-17	He will judge between one sheep and another.
1 Corinthians 15:20-28	He will hand over the Kingdom to his Father.
Matthew 25:31-46	He will judge those who have not served others.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Matthew:

“I was hungry and you gave me to eat (...).” We have here one of the best known parables from all of the Gospels. Found only in Matthew, this image of the Final Judgment, based on whether or not we have taken care of one another in this world, lies at the very core of Jesus’ teaching to his disciples. Matthew wanted the leaders of his Christian-Jewish community to know clearly what the bottom line was when it comes to judgment at the end of time. What standards will these leaders be judged by? For what will they be held accountable by God? How they treated Jesus! But, how they treated the Jesus who is to be found in every other human being! The *works of mercy* seem to have absolute priority, even over acts of worship.

The Last Great Discourse of Jesus, called the *Eschatological Discourse* (that is, the *Last Things* or teachings about judgment and reward or punishment), started in Chapter 24:1 with the prediction of the destruction of the Temple. It was followed by the forecast of the terrible things that would come upon the people of Jerusalem (*The Woes!*), the Great Tribulation, the Coming of the Son of Man for Judgment (like the Lesson of the Fig Tree), at a time not yet revealed (the Unknown Day and Hour), illustrated by three parables: 1. The Unfaithful Servant, 2. The Talents, 3. The Judgment of the Nations. This is where we are today: the climax of the Great Discourse. *Separating the Sheep from the Goats*: we have here a grand image for the Judgment. There will be a division. Some will be placed by God on one side, some on the other. Not everyone will end up in the same place. *Behavior does matter in this world. Our behavior will have eternal consequences!*

“*I was hungry...!*” *Jesus identifies himself with those who are in any human need at all!* What we do to others, we do to him. What we fail to do to others, we fail to do to him.

Ezekiel:

It is a traditional theme of the Jewish Scriptures that the Lord is the shepherd of his flock, Israel. The Lord is a committed shepherd; he seeks out the sheep who are lost, one by one. Individuals seem important to this Shepherd. It is not just a matter of keeping the whole flock secure but also reaching out to the individuals who have wandered from the flock. In earlier Jewish writings, there does not seem to be much awareness of individuals. It is the nation that matters to God. God saves the nation by rescuing it from bondage in Egypt, by guiding it through the wilderness into a land of milk and honey. Personhood was not even a concept in ancient Israel, nationhood was. Now,

with the Exile in Babylon, there emerges a new awareness of persons as individuals. God will seek them out, personally and individually. This Shepherd will even go up into the cloudy mountaintops to find stray sheep — even into the darkness of the night.

Corinthians:

There is a hierarchy in the heavenly economy: God at the summit, Christ under him, all who have been gathered to Christ, in him, presented as a gift and as a kingdom to the Father. This pyramid in Paul's Letters has had a great deal of influence on the development of Church structures in the Catholic tradition. However, we have put in all kinds of layers of human beings inside the bottom layer of Paul's pyramid and have made a pyramid out of that bottom rung which is the Church. We have reproduced in the Church itself the pyramidal structure that Paul describes as being in heaven. Our earthly pyramid has the laity at the bottom, the lower clergy above them, the higher clergy (bishops) on top of these, and the pope (Bishop of Rome) at the very top representing Christ. Before Vatican II, that was the only operational model of the Church, organically and structurally. A perfect model when describing the Church as kingdom under Christ! This model holds only limited application when referring to the Church on earth.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. If you were not a disciple of Jesus, how would you feel about this parable addressed to his disciples? Do you think that Jesus means that his disciples *only* will be judged by these standards? Or do you think that Jesus will judge the whole world by the practical behavior of all men, women, and children? Do you think that all people of goodwill, even those who do not explicitly have faith in Jesus Christ, will be judged according to the ways they have treated their neighbors?

2. Do you see a message of hope in this parable? Is it *good news* for every human being? Do you think the hungry, the thirsty, and the lonely find consolation in knowing that Jesus identifies himself with them? That Jesus challenges his disciples to deal with the needy as if it were his very self? Do you see yourself among the needy and the lonely? Are you willing to accept the care and the love of your fellow humans who come to you out of love for Jesus Christ?

3. Discuss the ways in which this parable provides the very foundation for all social service ministry in the Church. Do you remember how Saint Teresa of Calcutta always said that she served Christ in the poorest of the poor? What is your understanding of the Church's responsibility, as a worldwide community, for the hungry and the poor?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Ask the chairperson of your parish Social Justice & Peace Commission to suggest a project that your group or your family can undertake in a practical way over the next few months.

PRAYER

Lord God, thank you for taking my human actions seriously!

CATHOLIC PASTORAL PRACTICES

The Feast of Christ the King provides an occasion for a reflection on the dignity of human persons. If the fullness of majesty and power has been conferred on Jesus of Nazareth because of his obedience to the heavenly Father, then surely those persons who share in the same humanity within which Christ lived are doubly blessed with dignity and sacredness. Every human being, just because of the fact that he/she shares in the human condition, has been elevated to a new level of dignity by reason of the incarnation of the Word in the human flesh.

Humans are made in the image and likeness of God, according to the Genesis account. The Lord God breathed the very life of God into the nostrils of the man, making him/her to live of the Spirit. Having made the human couple, God pronounced them to be “very good,” indicating a special and unique relationship between humans and God. God provided an abiding dignity to all that is human, a dignity that could not be wiped away even by the sin of the first human. The Catholic tradition holds that human nature was *tainted, not corrupted*, by Original Sin.

When the Son of God became a man, one of us, one among us, the flesh of humans received a special dignity not heretofore conferred on men and women. The mystery of the Incarnation speaks not only about God’s love for Jesus of Nazareth but proclaims loudly and clearly God’s love for all persons on earth. If God has so exalted the human person, shall we not acknowledge the sacredness and holiness of human beings of every condition on the face of the earth?

In the Catholic tradition, sin does not alter the innate value of the human person. God loved us when we were still in sin. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:16).

See: The Catechism: # 355-361

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