

Homily on Matt 25, 31-46

November 27, 2017

Intro: On the last Sunday of the liturgical year we celebrate the final and eternal kingship of Jesus Christ, the Lord of history. He comes in glory, seated upon his royal throne for His final vindication of justice and peace for all nations. It is what we look forward to in all of our trials and sufferings for the Reign of God.

Matthew does not call this a parable; it is a vivid depiction of what will happen at the end of history. Jesus will summon all peoples, from all nations, to be judged based on their works. He details to both the blessed and the accursed what they have merited in their histories.

The criteria for salvation are what the Church calls the corporal works of mercy--- feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, nursing the sick, and visiting prisoners. That's it: there is nothing about belief and worship of God, nothing about Mass on Sunday, nothing about regular confession, nothing about rosaries or novenas or first Fridays, nothing even about the spiritual works of mercy. We are going to be judged on the basis of what we have done for the wretched of the earth with whom Jesus identifies himself: "Whatsoever you did to the least of my brothers, that you did to me."

The Meaning for us:

All, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, animists, even atheists will be judged by how they treated the marginalized and suffering in their various nations and in other countries. On Jesus' criteria undoubtedly a large number of these atheists and other religionists will be among the sheep, and many of us Christians will be among the goats.

This final word of Jesus always catches me up short. To how many shivering against the cold have I given warm clothing? How many hungry have I fed? How many prisoners have I visited? The problem is that I never see many of these; they are sequestered in parts of the city that I never visit. The closest I come is the beggar standing on the corner of the street. And how many of these have I ignored or avoided?

I always vote for those who think the government has an obligation to care for these suffering fellow men and women. Moreover, I have given my money to institutions that care for them, and much of that has arrived. But I have missed the joy of actually touching the ones who need not only my money but also a caring glance, a smile to a fellow human being---to Christ himself.

So where will I be on that last day? What then has been the point of my Sunday Masses, my rosaries, my first Fridays? The point of them is to make clear my obligations to the poor, and to strengthen my resolve to help as Jesus asks. The Mass stimulates me to do as Jesus did. When Jesus commands us "Do this in memory of me," he means that we are to give our own bodies as food to the hungry as he did and does. The point of the Mass is not just that the bread is transformed into Jesus, but that we are transformed from being selfish John into generous Christ. If the Mass does not do this, it is not Eucharist for me or for our world.

So this is the litmus test for my celebration of the Eucharist: Am I becoming more generous to the wretched of the earth? It is through me and my actions that Christ is king of the universe, partially now, and fully in the eternal kingdom which he will establish at the end of time. From that kingdom all evil will be banished and we will enjoy the fullness of love and peace. That is today's good news.