

LOST GOATS

Matthew 25: 31-46

Deacon George Collins

When I was very much younger and opened my first checking account the first lesson I learned was the closing balance of this month surprisingly was the same as the opening balance for the next month. I'm sure that you are saying to yourself; "that was a brilliant deduction". But did you ever apply that thought to so many other things.

The baggage I take to bed at night is the same baggage I wake up with the next morning. The attitudes I start my day off with are usually the attitudes I end my day with; and possibly spread it to others during the day. I mention this because as we close out the church's liturgical year with the feast of Christ the King; the next Sunday we start a new liturgical year with the season of advent. The day we die in this world is the same instant we start living in the next world. What do we carry from this world to the next?

When you read this gospel passage you heard about the end time. The coming of the Lord and His angels. The end and the beginning. The dividing people into two simple groups; sheep and goats. You read about charity and the lack of charity. Compassion and the lack of compassion. You read about generosity and selfishness, virtue and vice. How often do we think that what we do is so insignificant in the overall scheme of the world's transgressions that we will not be noticed. God sees all things; even the insignificant!

What does it take to have the Lord recognize us; who we are; what we do? A simple cup of water, given in the Lord's name does not go unrewarded. A simple act of kindness in the Lord's name draws more of His attention than all the monuments we build to call attention to ourselves. The monument the Lord seeks is built in our hearts and not out of stone.

Who were the sheep? Many were sinners who repented and converted their lives to the love of the Lord and their neighbor. Those who showed compassion in charity, sharing and caring.

Who were the goats? It's not that they were great sinners. Many, even most, were people who might say "why me Lord? I never murdered anyone; I never stole a penny! I always tried to tell the truth, I never lied [well, hardly ever]. I never committed adultery! Why me Lord? Why me. I don't get it. Isn't it interesting how we tend to measure our goodness by what we don't do! What a shock many of us are in for.

Today is a perfect time to change from goats to sheep. A perfect time because as we close out the old way of life we begin a new way of life. Each day is a new opportunity to change our hearts from self-centeredness to generosity. Each day can be a new advent for us, a new beginning. A definition of advent might well be summed up as a time for increasing the greatness of ordinary life. The things we do every day, we try to do just a little bit better. To take ordinary life and turn it up just one notch. To take holiness and raise it just one level. To take spiritual life and enhance it one more inch. All to squeeze a little more greatness into ordinary life. This is what the gospel passage is implying.

To take our gift of life and make it just a little bit better because of the coming of Jesus. So that families are just a little bit better; that all people are a little bit better because of the coming of Jesus. Be convinced that the same message Jesus brings us at the close of our liturgical year, is the same message to open our new liturgical year; the season of advent. A cup of water, given in His name to a stranger, a friend, an enemy, even to a family member is a power house!

This gospel passage is a step by step process to greatness in God's kingdom if we only see it. It shows us what the love of God is all about by having us focus on our spirituality in mind, heart and soul. We focus on spirituality in mind through piety. We focus on spirituality in heart through preparation. We focus on spirituality in soul through prayer. Piety, Preparation and Prayer, raise them just one notch. These are the things that really count at the end time.

This gospel passage also makes an excellent time to reflect on the Sermon on the Mount, for it applies so beautifully. It outlines who the sheep are. Blessed are the meek; the simple spirited; the hurting; the

merciful; the peace makers; the pure of heart; those who suffer for justice; etc. Rejoice for your reward in heaven is great. These are the sheep referred to. These are not weak qualities but the strength of the sheep; strong hard profiles that are needed to raise holiness just one more notch. This gospel is a call to wake up, to change, to motivation not hopelessness or indifference; a path to make greatness out of the ordinary.

What then is piety? Simply put it is love of one's family; human, spiritual and communal. It requires promoting family peace, forgiving old grudges and hurts; patients with others shortcomings. It seeks to encourage hope, gratitude and praise. These are the sheep! That which we take for granted becomes selfishness and slothful. Sloth is not laziness of the body but laziness of the soul. These are to goats!

The sheep take pride in their home by providing an environment that is Christian and uplifting. This is preparation. Included in this is our language pattern. Poor language defiles our homes and we wonder why children loose respect. Good language carries outside the home to bring joy and happiness. Materialism and a profane life leads to being goats; that which is uplifting leads to the sheep pen.

Again we must ask ourselves "is my home a house of prayer?" The greatest obstacle to prayer maybe ourselves. Prayer seems to come more readily to younger people than older people. As we grow older we may become spiritually starved. The middle aged prayer syndrome becomes mechanical and gradually fades away unless we take action. Prayer does not change God's will; but it just might change our will. All work can be turned into prayer and so can ordinary life be ennobled, spiritualized and made divine through prayer. Ordinary life can be raised to greatness if only we bring the inspiration of our love to others. To enhance our spiritual life just one more inch. These are the sheep! For they are the one's who try.

And who are the goats? The one's who think there is no need to confess their sinfulness. If we can not accept our own sinfulness then there is no need to pray; no need for forgiveness; no need for hope; no need for love and no need to change. We are perfect as we are!

The angels will not separate us according to our sins but according to our charity and love for one another. There are many sinners in heaven who repented here on earth; but there are no saints in heaven who didn't repent and turned to God and neighbor in both love and action. With the closing of the ages clearly outlined by Jesus in this gospel; let us use this message to begin a new life; then we can truly become the sheep in the Lord's kingdom; not the lost goats.

Jesus shows us not only the end time but also the new beginning in eternity. I wish to leave this message with a quote from St. Thomas More. "The times are never so bad but that a good man can live in them through prayer". So pray! Do ordinary things for the love of God. To prepare for the end time is to prepare for our new beginning in His kingdom. PEACE.