



LENT (Second Sunday)

March 17, 2019

SCRIPTURE READING - MATTHEW 25:31-46

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed Me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to Me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸ And when did we see You a stranger and welcome You, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹ And when did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?’ ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me. ⁴¹ Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, 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?’ ⁴⁵ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

REFLECTION

Unlike the typical image of fluffy white sheep and rugged brown goats, the animals in the parable are two breeds that look and sound the same. These types of mixed flocks were common in ancient Israel, and a good shepherd always knew the ways to tell each breed apart. For example, sheep are grazers that mainly eat grass, while goats are browsers that feed on grass, leaves, roots, and sometimes garbage. Furthermore, sheep will always come together in danger, while goats will scatter, climb trees, or try to fight the danger off. But the best way to tell the difference between sheep and goats is by their tails, for goat tails are always up while sheep tails are always down.

So, a good shepherd knew the ways to tell each breed apart, and the same is true for Jesus whose Church is like a mixed flock. Though from the outside many Christians look and sound the same, not everyone who claims the faith is a true believer of righteous heart. Our Lord was under no illusions that His Church would be “sheep only”, for He knew that goats would enter in and bring corruption to the flock. He knew that times would come when the movement He began would lose its way and seem to focus on serving itself instead of serving the least of these. Nevertheless, He promised a day when He would set things right and separate the righteous sheep from goats with an unrighteous heart.

Truly, as the parable shows, the Church is like a mixed flock and we must not think that we are called to separate the good from bad. Church history is littered with the failed attempts of well-intentioned people who came to harm many sheep while seeking to expel the goats. The only thing we are called to do is keep Christ’ way of service and love, and He promises that if we do this we will inherit a Kingdom prepared for us. Yet as we keep His way with faithfulness among the flock, then perhaps by our example we can transform goats to righteous sheep.

PRAYER

O Christ, Who is our Good Shepherd, we thank You for bringing us into Your flock and that even the unrighteous are welcome there. Lord, may we avoid the temptation to separate and “purify” your Church, and may we rest within the promise that You are working to set things right. Help us in this Lenten season to recapture the hope of the Kingdom prepared for us, and through us keeping Your humble way may You transform goats to righteous sheep. In Your name we pray. Amen