

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Mark 11:9, 10

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that
is to come!

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Matt 25:31-46; L160A

Jesus said to his disciples:

“When the Son of Man comes
in his glory,
and all the angels with him,
he will sit upon his glorious
throne,
and all the nations will be
assembled before him.

And he will separate them one
from another,
as a shepherd separates the
sheep from the goats.

He will place the sheep on his right
and the goats on his left.

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.

For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,
a stranger and you welcomed me,
naked and you clothed me,
ill and you cared for me,
in prison and you visited me.’

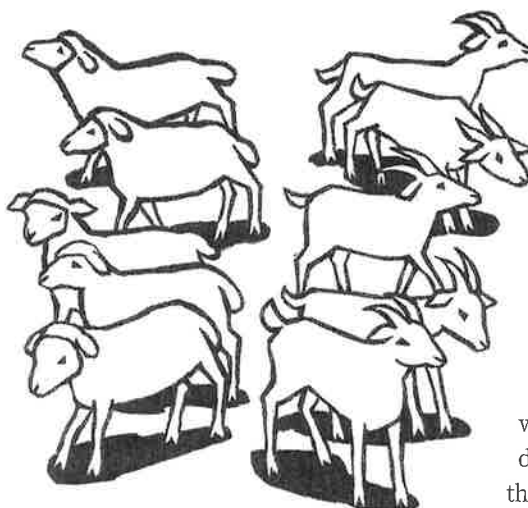
Then the righteous will answer him and
say,

‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and
feed you,
or thirsty and give you drink?

When did we see you a stranger and
welcome you,
or naked and clothe you?

When did we see you ill or in prison, and
visit you?’

And the king will say to them in reply,
‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did
for one of the least brothers of mine,
you did for me.’



Reflecting on the Gospel

Like climbing to the top of Mt. Everest, today's gospel reading is the pinnacle of Jesus' teachings in the Gospel of Matthew. This is not a parable, but instead the interpretive key to Jesus' teachings earlier in the gospel. Now what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (7:21-23), that "not all who call Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven," becomes clear. This story also foreshadows his resurrection appearance and promise in the closing line of the gospel, "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (28:20).

In the gospel story, we are two days from Passover when Jesus will be handed over to be crucified (26:1-2). All that remains between this teaching and the Passover meal Jesus will celebrate with his disciples is his anointing at Bethany by the woman with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil (26:6-13). So this teaching about how we will be judged is the crescendo of Jesus' message.

Jesus' promise to be with us always is fulfilled in that he is present in the hungry, thirsty, naked, ill, imprisoned, and in the stranger. Though some who claim to know Jesus are surprised that they did not see him in the face of the poor, this is to their own perdition. Even more, those who did not or do not know Jesus receive their heavenly reward precisely because they did the will of God; they fed the

hungry and in so doing they were feeding Jesus. They gave drink to the thirsty and in so doing they were giving drink to Jesus. Jesus does not say that it is as though he is present in these people. No, he is them: "I was hungry and you gave me no food." "What you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me." Again, Jesus does not say, "It's as though you did not do for me." He identifies with the poor and the lowly, for he is them.

There are no excuses on the part of those who claim to have known Jesus. They cannot say that the poor were not working, or they deserved to be poor, or they should get a job. Those who claim to know Jesus but have not acted on behalf of the poor are sent off to eternal punishment. "Depart from me, you accursed." We now see clearly how not everyone who cries Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom, but only those who do the will of my father (7:21-23). Indeed, this chapter and this particular teaching is at the root of the Catholic Church's "social gospel." It is why the church established hospitals, schools, food pantries, social services, and so many other ministries. Faith in action, rather than faith alone, is the church's credo. And it is not enough to rely on others, the church at large, to perform this ministry. It is the obligation of anyone who dares to call himself or herself a disciple of Christ. Indeed, those who do not know Christ but still perform these actions will inherit eternal life. These sober words conclude Jesus' teaching ministry and are a clarion call to all who would seek to follow him.

Living the Paschal Mystery

It is a bold thing to identify with Christ. From the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes, to this concluding teaching of Jesus on judgment, being a follower of Christ is not for the faint of heart. Self-sacrifice, love of the other, and service are central to the identity of a Christian. How mortally dangerous it is,

then, to call oneself Christian, to claim the role of disciple, without performing the actions required by one. It would be better not to claim the title at all.

Essential Matthean themes are expressed in this story: doing versus merely saying, is one. Doing the will of God—caring for the poor and for the stranger—is not merely about performing kind acts but is the basis of salvation, for Christian and non-Christian alike. As we live the paschal mystery, let us keep before us the awesome call and responsibility to express our faith in action, not merely words.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: “[W]hatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

To the point: In the golden rule, Jesus tells us we must care for our neighbor as ourselves. Today this commandment is expanded: we are to care for those in need as we would care for the Lord himself. For whether we are serving another or turning our gaze and walking away, we are comforting or rejecting the Lord.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: In the beginning of chapter 34 of Ezekiel, where our first reading is taken from today, God commands Isaiah to “prophesy against the shepherds of Israel” (34:2; NABRE). God accuses them that by not caring for the flock of the Lord, “my sheep became plunder . . . my sheep became food for wild beasts” (34:8; NABRE). This is the context for God to say at the beginning of the first reading, “I myself will look after and tend my sheep.” Because the kings and leaders have failed so miserably in their role as protector and shepherd, God will be the one to bring back the strayed, bind up the injured, and heal the sick.

to experience: Though both the first reading and the gospel talk about “sheep,” the metaphors used are very different. In one, God condemns the corrupt leaders of Israel for failing to care for his sheep. In the other, Jesus separates the sheep from the goats, with the former being those who have kept his commandments and the latter having neglected to care for the poor and suffering. There is a similar message in both readings, however: God identifies himself with the weak and the downtrodden, and he calls us to do the same.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Once again our psalm for today is Psalm 23. This is the third time this psalm has been proclaimed at the liturgy in the past two months. We prayed with it on the Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, as well as on All Souls’ Day. It is fitting for today, given the “sheep” present in both the first reading and the gospel; it is particularly hearkening to the reading from Ezekiel where God proclaims that he will be the one to tend the scattered sheep of the house of Israel. Our psalm reminds us that with the Lord as our shepherd, we will dwell in security and safety. This psalm could also be seen as another model for how we are to care for others. In John’s gospel Jesus tells his disciples, “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (13:34; NABRE). Psalm 23 gives us a portrait of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who guides his sheep and abundantly fulfills their needs. This is the generosity that we are to emulate in serving others.

to psalmist preparation: Just as the Lord shepherds you, how do you seek to be a good shepherd for those who have been given into your care?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

In the first reading from the prophet Ezekiel, God says, “I will rescue [my sheep] from every place where they were scattered.”

Thinking about your parish community, who is missing? How might you reach out to them?

How have you experienced God’s shepherding care most recently?

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Univers

Gospel (cont.)

Matt 25:31-46; L160A

Then he will say to those on his left,
 ‘Depart from me, you accursed,
 into the eternal 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,
 a stranger and you gave me no welcome,
 naked and you gave me no clothing,
 ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.’
 Then they will answer and say,
 ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty
 or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison,
 and not minister to your needs?’
 He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you,
 what you did not do for one of these least ones,
 you did not do for me.’
 And these will go off to eternal punishment,
 but the righteous to eternal life.”