

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Mar 10th 2014

I don't know about you, but I have always found this Gospel passage from Matthew a bit sobering, if not chilling. It causes me to sit up and take notice. First, the separation of the sheep and the goats. The thought that, we could, at the end of our lives, be judged by the Lord to be "goats" and not enter into the Kingdom is like a glass of cold water in the face.

If Jesus had ended this discussion with his disciples there, we would be troubled indeed. But he uses the analogy, like the exceptional teacher he is, to launch a concrete explanation of how to make sure they are not (and we are not) goats, separated from him for all eternity. Whew, we think, there's a way to ensure that doesn't happen and everything will be okay.

But then, like Jesus' parables, we find there is more to the story and the prescription is not so easy after all. It involves serving others, giving them food, clothing, hospitality and more, and not only that, but doing it for the least of our brothers and sisters. So, while it is certainly admirable to care for our loved ones, we must do more, showing love and compassion for the unlovable, the outcast. And the fact that we neglect to do that out of ignorance or indifference is no excuse.

The good news I find is that our compassionate deeds do not have to be done consciously. They can be as natural to us as breathing. But how do we guarantee that we do them? Left to our own devices, the odds are not too good. We will find the world's attractions and diversions tempting, and more interesting and "necessary" than caring for the least of our brothers and sisters.

As always, Jesus provides the solution. As he states in John 15:5, he is the vine and we are the branches. "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." By remaining in him through prayer, meditation, reflection on his words, participation in the sacraments, and much more that is available to us, he will empower us to be aware of our "least" sisters' and brothers' needs and to follow through whenever possible. If we do that, we will not live to simply satisfy our own needs and we will find ourselves to be sheep after all, not the goats.

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