

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Feb 19th 2024

Life is a time of choices – make the right ones!

Today's Gospel opens with a solemn introduction to the narrative of the Last Judgment.

The Gospel repeatedly speaks of a God who is infinitely merciful and forgiving. We believe not in a condemning God but in a saving God. Then, how do we interpret the terrible threats in today's Gospel as "good news" or "message of salvation?"

In Palestine, at sunset, shepherds tend to separate the sheep from the goats. The goats are more sensitive to cold and are placed under a roof. The sheep, covered with wool, like the cool of the night and have no problem spending the night in the open. Jesus conveys his message through this image, taken from everyday life. The language is typical of the preachers of that time. They used stunning images such as unquenchable fire and eternal penalties to provoke the listeners.

The text belongs to the judgment scene genre, found both in the Bible (cf. Dan 7) and in rabbinic literature. There is a presentation of the judge, accompanied by angels who serve as assistants and security guards, then the convocation of all people, the separation of groups, the sentencing and finally, the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished. This literary genre aims not to inform about what will happen at the end of the world but to teach how to behave today.

The Lord will judge us on the choices we have made. In fact, the Lord does not judge; rather, he only draws out the consequences of human choices. Life is a time for making robust, decisive, eternal choices. Indeed, we become what we choose, for better or for worse. If we choose to steal, we become thieves. If we choose to hate, we become angry. If we choose to spend hours on a cell phone, we become addicted.

Therefore, the question is not who will be counted as sheep and goats at the end of the world, but on what occasions today do I behave as sheep and under what circumstances do I behave as goats? We are sheep when we love our brother or sister; we are goats when we neglect him or her.

Pope Francis gives us a piece of advice to train ourselves to choose well. He writes: Ask yourselves these questions daily: "What do I feel like doing?" and "What is best for me?" This interior discernment can result in silly choices or decisions that shape our lives – it depends on us.

How funny or strange it would have been if the people on the right answered thus: "Yeah, Lord, we knew it was you we were serving when we fed the hungry and clothed the naked!" It doesn't fit the script! The remarkable thing is that these good souls had no idea they were serving Christ when they were engaging in these acts of mercy! Goodness is perfect when done unawares. How about you?

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