

This Solemnity in honor of Christ the King brings our liturgical year to a close. Next week is Advent and the start of a new liturgical year. This Sunday is dominated by the familiar parable of the sheep and the goats, the very last parable Jesus tells in Matthew's Gospel.

It is a grand and sweeping scene in which Jesus is pictured as a King and Judge. It describes a moment when all the nations will be gathered together, and everyone will be divided into two groups.

When all of the human race gathers for the great judgment, that is, Eskimos, ancient peoples of Africa, Asians, aborigines in Australia, people in Palm Springs and Paris, people in Toronto, Mexico City, Nigeria and St. Petersburg, athletes, rock stars, lawyers, manual laborers, teachers, airline pilots, students, professors, priests, computer programmers, when everyone is gathered for the great judgment, it is Jesus of Nazareth whom they will face.

The entire human race, from the first person to the last will have to appear before the Risen Christ. The Buddhists and the Hindus will have to appear before Jesus of Nazareth. The Jewish people and the Muslims will have to appear before Jesus of Nazareth.

Every terrorist will have to appear before Jesus of Nazareth. The humanists as well as the atheists will have to appear before Jesus of Nazareth. All people will have to appear before Jesus of Nazareth.

Ultimately, we are not responsible for our life only to ourselves as some would claim but to Jesus of Nazareth. For every person who ever lived, in the end stands before Jesus Christ. His is the last face all will see before they enter their eternity.

The second point is the measure by which we will be tested. We all remember when we were in school, the question we all had was, "What's going to be on the test?" Here, in this parable, Jesus tells us what is going to be on the test.

The Lord says, "What you did for the least of My brothers, you did to Me." Here, by the least of his brothers, the Lord means his apostles, his disciples and his people.

We cannot separate Christ from His Church. How people respond to the Church, to Christians, is their response to Christ. The Church is the concrete presence of Christ in every age. Our fidelity or indifference to the Church is fidelity or indifference to Christ.

Of course, for those who have never known the Church, the test for them is how they respond to any person in need. That is how our tradition has applied this parable to all of us, separating out the phony from the real.

The sign that we are truly renewed by Christ, that our loyalty to him is genuine, that our prayer is authentic, that the Holy Spirit dwells in us, that we are following the light given us, is not what we say but what we do. Specifically, have we cared for the least among us through the corporal or spiritual works of mercy?

The third point is the most disturbing. The sin of those left out of the kingdom and sent to darkness is not that they caused harm to those in need, because they didn't cause their hunger or nakedness or imprisonment. Their sin was that they did nothing! Absolutely nothing! They looked the other way.

We will be judged not only for what we did, but as importantly for what we failed to do. So don't be "goated" to indifference.

Some may ponder, "Why would a good God send people to hell?" is that God doesn't; but God will let people go there if they so choose. People do it all the time. People choose every day to live their lives apart from God—to ignore him, deny him, or even rebel against him. If they want to live apart from God for all eternity, God will allow them to do that, as well.

+In his book, *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis imagines hell as a dull, gray town in which the inhabitants continually build new houses for themselves in order to move farther and farther away from the people who bother them, until eventually no one can see or hear anyone from where they live.

When they are finally alone, they discover that the person they couldn't stand the most is themselves, and now they are stuck with themselves forever and the total absence of God.

Lewis suggests that if the doors of hell are locked, they are locked from the inside, as they prefer to live in darkness, isolation, and stubborn denial of their need for God. Hell, then, is a radical example of our freedom.

I would hope that most of us do strive and struggle to make the right decisions in our lives. Yes, we sin, and we freely choose to sin, and in our business we can overlook others, but we are trying to be good Christians through it all. We are here every weekend, showing we do care. That is why we come together to pray for one another and for those who went before us.

+Rev. Tony Campolo says that in his teenage years he was terrified by a visiting pastor's depiction of Judgment Day. This pastor claimed that one-day God would show us a movie of every single sinful thought, word, or action we ever committed. And he ended his lurid description with the announcement, "And your mother will be there!"

But Campolo hopes that Judgment Day will more closely mirror what happened during the trials over the Watergate scandal. The prosecutor brought in a tape of a conversation between Nixon and his aides. Just at the most crucial part of the tape, the section that revealed their crimes, there was an eighteen-minute gap of silence.

Nixon's faithful secretary, Rosemary Wood, had erased the incriminating evidence! In the same way, Campolo says, perhaps Jesus will erase some of the incriminating evidence against us as he did for the repentant thief crucified at his right side. I guess he is saying, if the secretary of Nixon will do it, God can be, there, as well. Well, we can hope!

But one way of certainty, is to keep our eyes open for our brother and sister in need, and just maybe, they will be our advocates for eternal live in Christ Jesus.