Gospel: MT 25:31-46

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,
illyou 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.’
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,
illyou cared for me, 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.”

HOMILY

No Bills story today, team – sorry, there’s nothing left to talk about there until next year.

But, I’d like to say a few words about an ad campaign that was put together a little over 10 years ago
and it’s since become one of the most successful, most quoted, most talked about, and most recognized ones.
Its’ intent was to bring to mind a sense of freedom, and it has met that objective, although not necessarily in a
here, stays here,” has been extensively applied elsewhere, such as this plaque that my wife, Barb, got as a gift a
few years ago. It reads, “What happens at Grandma’s, stays at Grandma’s.” You get the feeling that whatever
the grandkids do when they visit, no-one else gets to know anything about it. It becomes our secret.

So, our take-away today: What happens here at Church, shouldn’t stay here at Church, and can’t stay
here at Church.

Well, we made it through another year – no, not the calendar year, and not the school year, and not the
fiscal year. We made it through another liturgical year, another Church year, which effectively ends this
coming Saturday, just before Advent beginning next weekend. We have been treated to the Gospel of Matthew
this past year and, except for maybe an occasional solemnity, we won’t hear it again on a Sunday for another
two years, when we begin to repeat the 3-year liturgical cycle. The Gospel of Matthew, whose focus throughout the year has been on righteousness, including the first words we heard from Jesus in the Gospel, when John the Baptist balked at baptizing Jesus, and Jesus replied, “It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” The Gospel of Matthew, placing special emphasis on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes … those who are blessed by God … and encouraging us to fulfill God’s laws, most especially laws of charitable works. The Gospel of Matthew, which has Jesus telling His disciples, including us, at the Gospel’s very end, “I am with you always,” ties it all together in today’s reading by showing Jesus as King of all the nations and yet present in each one of us, especially those who are most in need. I’ll repeat that again – today’s Gospel passage brings Matthew’s teachings together by showing Jesus as King of all the nations and yet present in each one of us. Quite a challenge to comprehend, isn’t it.

What happens here at Church, shouldn’t stay here at Church, and can’t stay here at Church.

When I was a youngster, just a few years ago, I decided on a career in engineering – sure, there was the love of math behind it all, but there was some allure to my thinking that I could sit at a lab desk all day, by myself, and not worry that much about the rest of the world – it seemed tough enough to worry about me and my future, I didn’t seem to have a lot of extra time to worry that much about others. Not very Christ-like, huh.

As the years passed, God had other plans for me, as God has for each and every one of you. As we grow spiritually, we realize more and more that we are not in this world alone – some of us may realize it at an early age, some take much longer. I’m still catching up … We are all sheep in this world, and we are all tended to by a loving shepherd, as the first reading from Ezekiel tells us three times: “I myself will look after and tend my sheep. As a shepherd tends his flock when he finds himself among his scattered sheep, so will I tend my sheep.” We are scattered sheep because we live in a broken world – it’s broken because of things we do to ourselves but also because of hurts from others in the world. Again, from the first reading, “The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back.” Sounds like those times in our lives when we try to do something that we shouldn’t, things we do to ourselves – we get lost, we stray from God’s plan for us – God will seek us out, if we listen, if we hear. And, one more time from Ezekiel, “The injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal.” More often than not, injury and sickness may represent times in our lives when the world is inflicting hurt on us – we may wonder how we will recover, how will God intervene and help.

What happens here at Church, shouldn’t stay here at Church, and can’t stay here at Church.

Then, in our Gospel reading, the loving shepherd is now on a throne, and he is called a king, separating the sheep from the goats, separating those who are doing the Will of God from those who aren’t. Now, this isn’t just another parable, or just another story that Jesus is telling those around Him, and us. He is finishing up His discussion about the end-times, the destruction of the temple, false prophets, the unknown day and hour, and parables about the faithful servant, the foolish virgins awaiting the bridegroom, and wisely using the gifts that have been given us. This passage is the climax of His end-times discussion, the final judgment, and He is just a few days away from His Passion – Jesus wants His disciples to know how important it is for them to give positive assistance, to do something, to continue the work that He started by showing love for others … all others … and especially, the least among them. And, to emphasize how important that is, He made it personal – He put His face in those of the needy. When His disciples help others, they are helping Jesus.

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So, how is that positive assistance, that just doing something, working out for us today? St. Louis parishioners do a tremendous job in outreach to those around us: think Saint’s Place … who, by the way, uses
Jesus’ words from Matthew of helping others in their brochure; consider also Father Damien’s hospital in Haiti, Habitat for Humanity, Pittsford Food Cupboard, the recipients of last weekend’s Christmas bazaar, and all of the other charitable organizations that we are involved with, and all that we support with more tithing dollars than any one else in the diocese. Fantastic support for all! But let’s take a step beyond that: how is that positive assistance thing working out for us **personally**? I think we might each ask ourselves that question, putting the face of Jesus in the faces of the least among us. It may be a challenging question to answer – if we truly consider who the least of us might be in this very, very broken world of ours:

- both the unborn babies … and their mothers who may need assistance in many areas, not just financial
- those in prison for committing heinous acts
- the immigrants, especially those affected by the President’s ruling the other evening
- those who are materially, psychologically, socially, physically, morally and even spiritually poor

Deacon Kevin gave some specific examples last weekend of people who help those who need it. I’m sure you can think of others that are in your life who need help – think personal. If we fall short, we’ll know where we need to pray, and act.

Looking again at Matthew and the last words of his Gospel, the Great Commission – an even greater challenge awaits each of us, as disciples of Christ – helping others to understand the message of Jesus, helping them to be more … Christ-like. The world needs it, Christianity truly needs it. Mahatma Gandhi was the greatest leader of nationalism in British-ruled India in the first half of the 20th century; he inspired non-violence, civil rights and freedom across the world, and led India to independence. He wasn’t Christian, but had a great admiration for Jesus, and often quoted from Matthew’s *Sermon on the Mount*. He thought that Christians needed to live more according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, and if they did, “all of India would be Christian today.” What a challenge that presents to all of us, to help others live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Gospels! What a Christmas gift that would truly be to someone.

I’ll close with another Gandhi quote, which talks about how we can control our destiny and live according to God’s plan, and also help others do the same:

“Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny.”

What happens here at Church, our beliefs, our thoughts, our words, our actions, our habits, and our values … shouldn’t stay here at Church, and can’t stay here at Church. We each have to take Jesus’ message out into the world.