

Matthew 25:31-46

When the Last Day comes, there should be no surprises, because Jesus tells us plainly what will happen. He will come in His glory. He will bring all His angels with Him. He will sit on His throne. He will separate people one from another. And He will speak. He will speak to the sheep on His right, and to the goats on the left.

This will be no trial. No prosecutors or lawyers will be present. No jury will render a verdict. King Jesus will make His declaration, and there will be no appeal to a higher court. What He says is final. His judgment is supreme, and it is accurate. He will not listen before He speaks. He listens now. But on the Last Day He will not accept apologies. He will grant no pardons. He will not show mercy. Today He is merciful, but on that day His mercy will have come to an end.

King Jesus will first act and then speak. He will separate the sheep from the goats, and then He will speak to them. He will begin by saying to the sheep, *"Come."* He will speak to the goats by saying, *"Depart."* And this should be no surprise to any, because during their life here on earth, Jesus' sheep made a habit of coming to Him; and during their life here on earth, the goats made a habit of departing from Jesus. In a sense, everyone is their own judge. *"Come,"* Jesus will say to those who come to Him today. *"Depart,"* Jesus will say to those who depart from Him today. We judge ourselves by our own actions. The way we treat Jesus today is how He will speak to us on the Last Day.

Dear sheep, Jesus' words to you on that day will have no anger in them, no threats, no punishments; only gentle love and amazing kindness. And this is not what you sheep think you deserve. *"Jesus,"* say His sheep, *"when did we see You hungry and feed You, thirsty and give You drink...sick and in prison and visit You?"* *"Come,"* Jesus will say to His sheep, *"inherit the kingdom prepared for you."* But the sheep say, *"Are you sure? We didn't do all those things You say we did. We do not deserve this kindness. We do not deserve a place in Your eternal kingdom."* This is how Jesus' sheep live today. They come when Jesus calls to them, but they do not take credit for coming. They love Jesus, and they show it by how they live, but they do not expect a reward for it.

Those who are goats will hear no love in Jesus' words to them. They do now, but they will not on the Last Day. They will hear only anger, and threats, and punishments. And this is not what the goats think they deserve. *"Jesus,"* say the goats, *"when did we see You hungry and not feed You, thirsty and not give You drink...sick and in prison and not minister to You?"* *"Depart,"* Jesus will say, *"into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* But the goats will say, *"Are You sure? We did all those things You say we didn't do. We deserve better than this. We deserve a place in Your eternal kingdom."* This is how the goats live today. They depart from Jesus when He calls to them, but they always have a good reason to give. They do not truly love Jesus, and it shows in how they live, but they expect the reward of heaven anyway.

How bitter that day will be for the goats! How joyful it will be for the sheep! Should we be wondering which emotion we will have on that Last Day? Will I be placed with the sheep on Jesus' right, or will I be with the goats on the left? There is no need to wonder. Where am I today? My attitude toward Jesus today shows me where I will be on that day. When Jesus invites

me to come to Him, do I come? Do I sit, like Mary did at Jesus' feet, and listen as His words are preached and taught? Do I come, as He bids me to do, when He offers me His body and blood for my forgiveness?

You sheep come to Jesus, not because you are better than the goats, but because Jesus draws you. He named you as His sheep even before you were born. "*Come,*" He says to His sheep, "*inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" In grace Jesus chose you to be His sheep from eternity. He did not look ahead to see if you would live like a sheep. He first chose you out of pure grace. This is why you live as His sheep. He chose you, He washed you in Baptism, He feeds you with His Sacrament, He nourishes you with His words of life. This is why you love Him. This is why you come when He calls you. And this is why you take no credit for being His sheep. It is by His grace alone that you are His sheep. You do not earn your place in His eternal kingdom. Your place was prepared long before you were even born.

The goats have no excuse. They cannot say: "My place in the eternal fire was prepared for me before I was even born. I never had a chance!" No. That fire, Jesus says, was "*prepared for the devil and his angels.*" It was not prepared for any human being. Instead, Christ Jesus died for all human beings. He poured out His blood on the cross for the sheep and for the goats. No one was excluded. No one can say, "Jesus is not my Savior." He is your Savior! He died for you out of mercy. He calls to the goats just as He calls to the sheep. When the goats do not come, it is not God's fault; it is their own. When the goats are told to "Depart!" on the Last Day, they will have no one to blame but themselves.

This is the Last Sunday of the Church Year. This is the last time during the current year that we will hear the call to repentance. Do we think that we have plenty of time? "*Today,*" the Scripture says, "*is the day of salvation.*" It is the goats who are always waiting for tomorrow to repent. But tomorrow never comes.

God is here with mercy today. Here today the Sacrament is on the altar for you. Here today His arms are open to you. You may be, in your opinion, the worst goat on the planet, but you have a God who, this very day, says to you: "I love you, and I forgive you. Don't tell Me that you're a goat. Instead, listen to Me when I tell you what I have done for you. I gave My life for you. I suffered the penalty you deserve. I was thrown into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels, and I did this to put that fire out for you. Don't tell Me you're a goat. Believe Me when I tell you that you're a sheep; a sinful sheep, yes; a straying sheep, yes, but My precious sheep. And you are here today because I have drawn you here. Repent of your sinfulness. Turn away from your goatish behavior and live like My sheep. Come when I call you. Listen when I preach and teach. Come to My Supper; it's for you. Stop thinking you're a goat. Be the sheep I called you to be."

Today, my friend, you hear God's mercy. This day will come to an end, but today His mercy is for you. Let us all be sheep, therefore, who today repent and believe the good news Jesus speaks in mercy to us. And tomorrow, when the Last Day comes, we will hear: "*Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" Amen.