

The Day of Judgment can also be called the day of separation. Now, the wheat and the weeds grow together in the same field. Now, the sheep and the goats mingle with each other. Jesus does not separate these from each other now. But in the end, He will.

Every man, woman, and child who has ever lived, is living now, or will live, will be gathered before King Jesus. There will be no trial, no jury. Jesus knows His sheep. And all His sheep, every one of them, He will place on His right, but the goats on the left. His verdict will be final. There will be no appeal to a higher authority. "*All authority,*" He declares, "*has been given to Me.*"

This day of judgment, of separation, will be a day of great rejoicing for Jesus' sheep. But for the goats, it will be the complete opposite. How are we to prepare for this final day? And should we have concerns, even great worry over it?

There are some, perhaps many, who think they are preparing for this final day by feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and those in prison. Because Jesus will say to His sheep: "*As you did (these things) to the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.*"

But if doing these things is how many people are preparing for the final day, what need to they have for Holy Baptism and Holy Communion? For the preaching of God's Word and the reading and studying of that Word? And for gathering with the people of God for the Divine Service? They can dispense with all of these things, as many of them do. Indeed, their Sunday mornings would best be spent going out to feed and clothe those in need. Their money would best be spent not in supporting the work of Jesus' Church, but in funding social programs designed to help the helpless.

But how sad and how tragic for them it will be on the Day of Judgment. Thinking that their actions of feeding and clothing the needy would place them on Jesus' right hand, they ignored His true brothers.

Who is King Jesus pointing to when He says: "*these My brothers?*" "*As you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.*" He is not pointing to His sheep on His right, nor to the goats on the left, nor to the needy among them. He is speaking of, and pointing to, a different group of people entirely.

In Matthew 19, Jesus tells His disciples: "*When the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*" These are Jesus' brothers; these disciples He is speaking to. These disciples whom He sends out as apostles to preach the good news of the Kingdom – to these He points when He says: "*these My brothers.*" And he sends them saying this to them: "*he who hears you, hears Me.*"

And just who is it that listened to Jesus' disciples? Who heard their message, and repented upon hearing it? Who listened to these brothers of Jesus and rejoiced to believe in the Christ they were preaching? The sheep. Not the goats, but the sheep. "*My sheep hear My voice,*" says Jesus.

The sheep know that when Jesus' messengers preach Jesus' own words, it is Jesus preaching through their mouths; it is the voice of Jesus they are hearing. To listen to Jesus' messengers is to listen to Jesus.

To feed and clothe these messengers of Jesus is to feed and clothe Him. To care for them, even the least of them, is to care for Jesus.

The poor and needy, the naked and sick – these will not sit upon thrones judging with King Jesus. His disciples will, His messengers. Those who preach the good news of salvation.

And so, dear sheep, and I call you sheep because right now, today, you are behaving as sheep. You are listening to the one who preaches Jesus to you. You are gathering with fellow sheep because this is what sheep do. Sheep do not separate themselves from the voice of Jesus. Where His voice calls, they come to hear. And they are not offended by the poor preacher, even the least of Jesus' messengers, because the sheep know that he preaches Jesus' own words to them. Sheep take care of the one who preaches the good news of Jesus to them because they love the Jesus he is preaching.

And so, he who preaches, had better be careful not to preach a false Jesus. He must be certain that the message he preaches is the message Jesus puts in his mouth for the sheep to hear.

Sheep are not goats. Goats ignore Jesus' messengers, and thus, they ignore the message. Sheep do not. Goats do not care about supporting Jesus' messenger. Sheep do. Goats may, or may not, mistreat the one Jesus sends to preach the good news. They simply have little use for him. But sheep greatly appreciate the messenger because they love the message he preaches to them. And the goats, they separate themselves from Jesus' messengers, and thus, from the message he preaches. Sheep do not. They gather with other sheep to hear the voice of Jesus.

The day of separation is coming. But that day is not now. Now is not the time for you to separate from each other, to separate yourself from the one Jesus sends to preach to you, to separate from the Holy Sacraments and from the Divine Service. Now is the time to come together. To confess our sins with one voice. For whether we are sheep or goats, we are all great sinners before God. And now is the time to open our ears and hear the voice of Jesus. His voice, coming through the mouth of His messenger, declaring with all authority that your sins are forgiven.

He does not separate between sheep and goats now. He declares that all are forgiven of their sins. This means that you are forgiven. His blood ran down the cross also for you. Whether you think you are a sheep or a goat, Jesus' word of forgiveness is for you. And His sheep hear that comforting word. Sheep believe they are forgiven of their sins because, "*My sheep hear My voice.*"

And so, today my friend, you are preparing for the final day by being here with open ears. It is Jesus who has brought you here. He knows His sheep. And He gathers His sheep around Himself today so that they will rejoice to gather around Him on the final day.

Do not worry. Do not be concerned. You are here on Jesus' right hand today where He feeds you and blesses you. And thus, you will be on His right hand also on the final day. Amen.