



Nov. 26, 2017 Mt. 25: 31-48 & Ezek: 34: 11-17

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Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [Doing the Right Thing...](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#)

ENTERING THE SCENE:

Q. What makes a person a Christian? What characterizes a Christian in contrast to the non-Christian?

A. A Christian is someone who's animated by the spirit of Christ, a person in whom the spirit of Christ can work. That doesn't always mean that you consciously know what you are doing. As it says in Matthew 25: "When have we seen you hungry? When have we seen you thirsty?" These people had no idea that they did what they did for Christ, and that it was Christian. But Christ said: "Because you did it, you did it for me." This is the final consequence of the Incarnation of God. The Word is no longer word; it has really become flesh. That means it never depends upon whether we say the right words, but whether we live the right reality. A Christian is someone who's inhabited by the spirit of Christ, which is a gift, as we know, yet a gift that we can say yes to without fully understanding the gift! Pg. 154-5.

Rohr, Richard. *Simplicity: the Art of Living*. NY: Crossroad. 1992.

Mt. 25:31-48

31 When the Son of Man comes in his **glory**, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly **glory**. 32 All the

nations will be gathered before him, and he will **separate** the people one from another as a **shepherd separates the sheep** from the **goats**. 33 He will put the **sheep** on his **right** and the **goats** on his **left**. 34 Then the **King** will say to those on his **right**, 'Come, you who are **blessed** by my Father; take your **inheritance**, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was **hungry** and you gave me something to eat, I was **thirsty** and you gave me something to drink, I was a **stranger** and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you **clothed** me, I was **sick** and you looked after me, I was in **prison** and you came to visit me.' 37 Then the **righteous** will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you **hungry** and feed you, or **thirsty** and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a **stranger** and invite you in, or needing **clothes** and **clothe** you? 39 When did we see you **sick** or in **prison** and go to visit you?' 40 The King will reply, 'I tell you the **truth**, whatever you did for one of the **least** of these **brothers** of mine, you did for me.' 41 Then he will say to those on his left, '**Depart** from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was **hungry** and you gave me nothing to eat, I was **thirsty** and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a **stranger** and you did not invite me in, I needed **clothes** and you did not **clothe** me, I was **sick** and in **prison** and you did not look after me.' 44 They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a **stranger** or needing **clothes** or **sick** or in **prison**, and did not help you?' 45 He will reply, 'I tell you the **truth**, whatever you did not do for one of the **least** of these, you did not do for me.' 46 Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to **eternal life**."

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Those who responded to the needs of others did so without expecting anything in return. In fact they didn't even remember doing anything for Jesus. When was the last time you responded to a need just because it was the "right thing to do"?

PRAYER: Lord, you so identified with us that you opened yourself whenever and wherever you encountered a real unmet need. So often I miss a chance to respond because I don't identify with the other who is in need. I pass by, often telling myself that this is not my business: or, worse yet, looking for an excuse to blame the victim. Help me to see that each time I do that I am forgetting and foregoing a chance to grow in love. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

GLORY: We often use the word glory when we try to express the ultimate in beauty or achievement. Moses was only given a glimpse of God's glory which was described as God's goodness in Ex. 33:19.

How is Jesus a revelation of God's glory for you?

BLESSED: To be blessed is to have God's help, a communication of life from Yahweh. This help enables us to meet the challenges of life with the confidence that we are not alone in the situation.

When have you last felt blessed? Did you feel that you were tapping into a source of strength other than your own?

BROTHERS: In Jesus' day, the word brother meant more than someone of the same parents. It often included members of the tribe or clan. Kings often called each other brother. The early Christians used this term to include people of the faith over 160 times.

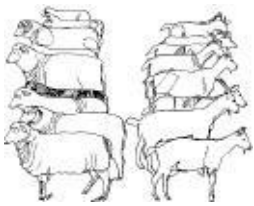
How wide a circle do you draw when using this term today? Who are your brothers/sisters? If we are all children of the same father, who is not a 'brother' or 'sister'?

CLOTHES: Often the poor only owned the clothes on their backs. This usually consisted of an undergarment and a single overgarment called a coat. This was usually the only thing they had to sleep under and to keep warm and dry.

Who has 'clothed' you when you were 'naked'? What are the ways that you can be 'naked'? What keeps you 'warm' and 'dry'?

DEPART: To depart is to go away. In this case it is a direction given to those who failed to recognize Jesus in those who were in need.

How does realizing that all people are brothers and sisters of Jesus prevent such a failure of recognition? How can this piece of scripture help you in this recognition?



GOATS: Goats need very different conditions to thrive than do sheep. They were pastured together, but were separated at night because of their different needs.

Knowing this about goats, what possibilities for understanding this scripture emerge in you?

HUNGRY: All living things need food of some kind to live and grow. Therefore, much of life is taken up in the process of obtaining nourishment.

Is scripture study a source of nourishment for you? Have you ever gone away 'hungry' from a person or place that you expected to feed you?

INHERITANCE: An inheritance is something left to you because of the work of another person.

What has been your inheritance in faith? Who left it to you? How?

KING: In the time of Jesus, the King was the one empowered by God to watch over the people and provide for their well-being. Jesus often used the metaphor of the King when speaking of his Father.

Whom do you empower with leadership? Do they provide for your wellbeing? Does the word King have a positive effect on you when you hear Jesus talk about the Father as a King? If not, why not?

LEAST: The least is the smallest in size or degree of something. Jesus identified himself with the "little ones".

Does this help you understand Jesus' God better? Can you find a place among those 'least' mentioned in this piece of scripture? Do you see Jesus in those 'little ones'?

LEFT/ RIGHT: The right and left sides correspond to the two hands of a person. These were the places of honor at table when a host was seating guests. The right was the first place and the left was the second place.

How do you feel about the way Matthew shapes this saying of Jesus? Can you find this story in any other of the gospels? If not, why do you think they left it out?

NATIONS: The concept of nations was a relatively novel idea in Jesus' day. Because of the temptation to build power by way of nations, and thereby feel less need for God's help, the word nations often took on a negative connotation.

How does this final gathering affect this concept of 'nations'?

PRISON: A prison in Jesus' day was not used for punishment. It was a place to detain someone awaiting trial or punishment. Often it was used to get people out of sight and therefore out of mind.

How does this understanding help to explain this story?

RIGHTEOUS: To be righteous is to be in right relationship with God and creation.

What does this tell us about the ones called righteous in this story? Using this criterion, where are you in this story?

SEPARATE: To separate is to sort out one thing from another. The paradox in the story is that in separating themselves from the 'least', the people missed Jesus.

How do you 'separate' what is good and not good? Is even the task of separating a part of the problem? How? Why?

SHEEP: Sheep were animals that needed a lot of special care in order to thrive. A good book to unpack the metaphor of sheep often used in scripture is Phillip Keller's [A Shepherd Looks at Ps. 23](#). The interdependence of the shepherd and their sheep was all-important.

Are you a sheep of the good shepherd? Do you need a lot of special care in order to thrive? Is your shepherd a good shepherd?

SHEPHERD: The shepherd needed to know the sheep and their needs very well.

Do you feel that God knows your needs well? Do you feel that having you as a sheep of God's flock enriches God?

SICK: To be sick is to become very aware of your need for others help to take care of you. It also reminds you of your vulnerability.

How does helping the sick enable you to see Jesus? How does being helped enable you to experience God's love and care?

STRANGER: To be a stranger is to be an unknown person.

How does welcoming those you do not know enable you to see Jesus? How does this act of welcoming enable you to come to know yourself?

THIRSTY: A person can live a long time without food, but not long without water.

Remember the last time you were really thirsty. How did it feel? What do you remember about the one who gave you something to drink?

TRUTH: Truth is a reality that resonates in our hearts and minds as something trustworthy and life giving.

What is it about Jesus' words that you can trust as being truth? How can you discern when those words are being twisted into untruth?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 25:31 // Mt. 16:27; Mt. 25:32 // 2 Cor. 5:10; Mt. 25:35 // Is. 58:7; Mt. 25:36 // Ezek. 18: 18:7f; Heb. 13:3; Mt. 25:40 // Mt. 10: 40; Mt. 25:41 // Mt. 7:23; Lk. 13:27; Mt. 25:42 // Job 22:7; James 2:14-17; Mt. 25:46 // Dan. 12:2.

To Mt. 25:31: Origen, commentary on Matthew 13:2 -- And Jesus said, "Because of the sick they were sick, and because of the hungry they were hungry, and because of the thirsty they were thirsty."

To Mt. 25:40: Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* I. 19.94, 5 -- "For," he said, "you have seen your brother, you have seen your God."

Tertullian On *Prayer* 26: He said, "You have seen your brother; you have seen your Lord."

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Ezek. 34:11-12, 15-17; [Ps. 23: 1-6](#); 1 Cor. 15: 20-26,28; Mt. 25: 31-46;

Revised Common Lectionary: Ezek. 34: 11-16, 20-24; [Ps. 100](#); Eph. 1:15-23; Mt. 25: 31-46;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

As we turn to Christianity we must again be sensitive to the social context in which Christianity developed. The early Christians were a minority group within a minority group in a world dominated by a Roman-Hellenistic culture. As we have seen, this made the issue of boundary clarification a vital concern to the Christians. Although the Christians set those boundaries differently than their fellow monotheists did, they nonetheless demonstrated the same in-group/outgroup divide that we encountered in our discussion of Judaism. A clear expression of this dichotomous approach is found in Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats. Mt. 25: 32-41.

Particularly notable about this passage is the severity of the treatment toward those in the outgroup. In our examples from the Jewish Scriptures, those outside the group merely suffered death; here they suffer eternal torment. Christianity raised the stakes for being on the wrong side of the divide. Throughout the Gospels the opponents of the Christians are categorized not merely as dangerous or evil but as in league with the devil. Pagels points out that in "the ancient world, so far as I know, it is only Essenes and Christians who actually escalate conflict with their opponents to the level of cosmic war" (1995, 84).

...Both the early Christians and Essenes were radical, minority sects within first-century Judaism, and as such they had little temporal power to exercise in defense of their group and so were less able to punish those who defected. If the cost of defection is low, the likelihood of defection increases. This raises the cost of cooperation. A group cannot survive under such circumstances. Divine retribution then assumes a more essential role. Individuals could, theoretically, enjoy the benefits of membership in a Christian community, then defect before reciprocating and be protected from punishment by being absorbed back into the more powerful majority group. However, in doing so they were now aligning themselves with the enemy of God and could have no hope of escaping divine justice. Pg. 768. Teehan, John. *The Evolutionary Basis of Religious Ethics*. Zygon. 9/06

This dramatic scene vividly portrays the meaning of the discipline of action. Action with and for those who suffer is the concrete expression of the compassionate life and the final criterion of being a Christian. Such acts do not stand beside the moments of prayer and worship but are themselves such moments. Why? Because Jesus Christ, who did not cling to his divinity, but became as we are, can be found where there are hungry, thirsty, alienated, naked, sick, and imprisoned people. Precisely when we live in an ongoing conversation with Christ and allow his Spirit to guide our lives, we will recognize him in the poor, the oppressed, and the downtrodden, and will hear his cry and respond to it wherever he reveals himself. Thus, action and prayer are two aspects of the same

discipline of patience. Both require that we be present to the suffering world here and now and that we respond to the specific needs of those who make up our world, a world claimed by Jesus Christ as his own. So worship becomes ministry and ministry becomes worship, and all we say or do, ask for or give, becomes a way to the life in which God's compassion can manifest itself. Pgs. 120-1. Nouwen, Henri, et al. Compassion. NY. Image Books. 1983.

But Paul did not quote the hymn (Phil 2: 6-11) to expound the doctrine of the incarnation. As a former Pharisee, he knew that religious truth had to be translated into action. He therefore introduced the hymn with this instruction to the Christians of Philippi: "In you minds, you must be the same as Christ Jesus." They must also empty their hearts of egotism, selfishness, and pride. They must be united in love, "With a common purpose and a common mind." Pg 383. Armstrong, Karen. The Great Transformation. NY. Alfred Knopf. 2006.

Possibly the most challenging move the devout, especially the Christian, must make is to see behavior rather than confessional beliefs as the defining feature of a religious person. Religion is what one does, not necessarily what one professes. Although this may seem challenging, there is much basis for it in the Judeo-Christian tradition as well as in other traditions. In Mt. 25:31-46 Jesus describes the judgment of the Son of Man. This final judgment is based on behavior-"I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, naked and you clothed me"-with no mention of beliefs. Interestingly, historians have identified this particular passage as a likely authentic teaching of Jesus. This should hardly be surprising, as there is a long tradition in rabbinical Judaism of emphasizing behavioral compliance with God's laws as paramount over any "correct" set of intellectual beliefs. The Hebrew Scriptures even go so far as depicting God anointing a non-Jew as the chosen one to save Israel (see Isaiah 44-45). This theme is prominent not only in the Jewish roots of Christianity but in its Hellenistic ones as well. In Plato's *Phaedo* (82a84c), Socrates discusses the destination of the soul after death, clearly stating that it depends on the manner in which one has lived life: ". . . the destination of others will depend on the way in which they have behaved. The happiest of these, who will also have the best destination, are those who have practiced popular and social virtue" These passages suggest that the devout need not consider placing behavior above belief as a fundamental or intolerable break with long-standing tradition. Rather, it can be defended as the rediscovery of old traditions that have been, for various reasons, devalued over the long course of history. Pgs. 311-12.

Rossano, Matt J. Religion on Which the Devout and Skeptic Can Agree. *Zygon*. 6/07.

Jesus, who came from a family of skilled peasants (he and his father were probably carpenters in rural Nazareth), when confronted with the suffering of the lost sheep, was moved to approach them with such unexpected, self-forgetful, and heart-felt devotion that he totally identified with them (Mt. 25: 31-46).

Peters, Dr. Carmichael. A Gadamerian Reading of Karl Rahner's Theology of Grace and Freedom. NY. Catholic Scholars Press. 2000. Pg. 91.

"Sorrow is an unwelcome companion and anyone that willingly enters into the pain of others is a truly remarkable person".

Henri Nouwen

The Egyptian book of the dead and the Talmud both have the dead boasting of their deeds. Christians therefore transcend themselves in the body of Christ even while they are transformed by participation in that form of life. Such self-transcending transformation does not stop within the boundaries of the institutional church, of course. Christian mission brings the body and its members into the world, empowering activity directed toward the transformation of social structures and the establishment of justice in human societies. And accomplishment of these goals requires intersubjective participation and input from the human community as a whole. So our giving a cup of water to those in prison is out giving to Christ, even as our receiving the cup of water from the Samaritan (and those not of faith or even those in other faiths) is our receiving from the Spirit of Christ. In this way, the concrete and specific field of activity belonging to those empowered by the Spirit of Jesus of Nazareth interacts mutually with the various other natural and socio-historical fields of activity as each is being redeemed by God.

Jong, Amos. Christian & Buddhist perspectives on Neuropsychology & the Human Person. *Zygon*. 3/05 Pg.152.

The Transitory Character of our Technical Enterprises

As previously discussed, our laws of physics and biology are transitory; they have an unknown but finite life, until the consummation of history and the end of time, which theology terms "the eschatological moment." Our technology, founded on these laws, must then also be transitory. This assessment of faith is consonant with scientific predictions of the far future. Such an assessment should not bring us to a kind of disdain regarding our technical enterprises and their progress. The eschatological new creation will not be "out of nothing" (*ex nihilo*), as the original creation, but "out of the old creation" (*ex vetere*) in which we now live. Thus, the dimension of eternity is introduced into our technical activity, particularly if that activity is guided by the love principle. For instance, solidarity with the third world in order to find ways of sharing well-being will surely deserve eternal value. (Mt. 25: 35-6).

Doncel, Manuel G. S. J. The Kenosis of the Creator and of the Creator Co-Creator. *Zygon*. 12/04. Pgs. 795-6.

The feast of Christ the King was instituted by Pius XI on 12/11/1925. It is placed on the last Sunday of the liturgical year. Mediterranean cultures are oriented primarily to the present. Future events are very difficult to imagine and nearly impossible to grasp. Activities that do not have to take place at the present moment are routinely put off. For the Spaniards there is *manana*, and for the Italian, *domani*. The popular song lyrics say, "Let's forget about *domani*." Even Jesus reminded his followers not to "worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today (Mt. 6:34).



Picture: Bible Review, Dec. 1998, Page 27.

In concert with the early strain of ethical concern for the stranger found in the Hebrew narratives, and in contrast to a simultaneous mistrust of them, much of Christian scripture and tradition exhibits remarkable compassion and concern. The very fabric of the Jesus movement, early Palestinian Christianity, and the missionary movement of the first generation is dependent on itinerancy and requisite hospitality. In addition, a remarkable and ultimate eschatological claim is made for the stranger. Not only are strangers to receive compassion, but their special status relates them to the moral significance of the sacred itself. To love the stranger is to love God. Indeed, this kind of love serves as an unexpected standard of judgment and mercy itself 25.44. As opposed to dread of becoming a stranger, one is to see this state of being, to become a *hoparagon*, a passer-

by, as the way to God itself (Gosp. Thomas log. 42.)

Carson, Timothy, L. Liminal Relativity and Transformational Power. NY. Univ. Press of Amer. Inc. 1977. Pages 19-20.

When I eat the bread my brother made, I am somehow interpenetrated by my brother's toil. And he in turn is interpenetrated by whatever recompense I give him in return. ...this interpenetration into one another's needs and labors is itself interpenetrated by God. That is, we cannot reject our brother in need and claim to have an intimate relationship with God.

Finley, James. Merton's Palace of Nowhere. Notre Dame, IN. Ave Maria Press. 1978.

God's perception of the chaos is not derived inductively from existing patterns, but individually. Each infinitesimal microstate is an object of divine attention in its pure context-independent status. Knowledge of particulars rather than of collections is perhaps the only way the chaos can be known without compromising its fundamental autonomy. A field of infinite difference requires unlimited discrimination or resolution. God's survey of the chaos is inclusive yet discrete. Divine discretion is just this absolute and undivided attention paid to "the least of these," even to the depths of chaos. God's perfect distinguishing of the infinitely subtle states of the chaos can be identified partially with the divine omniscience. God's powers of discrimination are unlimited (an understanding of omniscience), and God's powers to communicate and create are also unlimited (an understanding of omnipotence).

Hutchingson, James E. Pandemonium tremendum: Chaos and Mystery in the Life of God: Chaos, Communications Theory, and God's Abundance. Zygon, June 2002. Page 403.

Mother Gail Fitzpatrick uses Mt. 25:34 as the basis for a chapter talk on Self Transcendence She closes the chapter with: "Lord Jesus, we pray that we may not be afraid to live on the edge of existence, to live radically open to life and to death in self-transcending love. Fitzpatrick, Mother Gail, OCSO. Seasons of Grace: Wisdom from the Cloister. Chicago. ACTA Pub. 2000. Page 165.

In a book titled "Good Goats" the authors talk about healing our image of God. This small paperback is a good book to take on the question of punishment and "hell". Linn, Dennis, et al. Good Goats. Mahwah, NY. Paulist Press. 1994. Pages 85-7.

The highest perfection consists not in interior favors or in great raptures or in visions, or in the spirit of prophecy, but in the bringing of our wills so closely in conformity with the will of God that, as soon as we realize that He wills anything, we desire it ourselves with all our might, and take the bitter with the sweet, knowing that to be His Majesty's will.-- Teresa of Avila

Every action of our lives touches on some chord that will vibrate in eternity. - E Chapin

Mt. 25.31-46: The final judgment. 31: Son of Man, see Dan 7.13-14; see 8.20n. 32: All the nations, see 24.13n. The judgment of both Jews and Gentiles (see 5.21-22; 7.2; 12.36,41-42; 16.27; cf. Isa 66.18; Ezek 34.17; Mic 4.3; Rom 2.13-16). Separate people, Jewish writings attested to an exalted human being who will judge the nations (2 Bar. 72.2-6; 11QMelch 2.13), although in rabbinic sources God is the judge (b. Rosh Ha-Shanah. 8a; 16a-b). Sheep from the goats, representing righteous and wicked, respectively (see Ezek 34.12). 33: Right hand, the side of righteousness and justice (20.21-23; 1 Kings 22.19; Ps 110.1; cf. 1 Kings 2.19; Ps 45.9; Rom 8.34). 34: 5.3; Lk 12.32; Rev 13.8; 17.8. 35-36: Isa 58.7; Jas 2.15-16; Heb 13.2; 2 Tim 1.16. 40: 10.42. 41: Eternal fire, see 7.19n. 46: See Dan 12.2; Jn 5.29; 2 Bar. 51.6. Righteous, salvation is based on works of compassion (1.19n.; 3.14n.; 5.6; 6.1; 10.11; 21.32; 22.14; cf. Jn 5.29). Pg. 47. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. Pgs. 213-216. To order contact Carol Oberfoel
https://newmelleray.org/Homily_Library 10/9/2017