



Our Lord Jesus, Christ the King November 26, 2017 A

Reflection on the Great Sermon Matthew 25:31-46

When it comes to preparing for Judgment Day or our Ultimate Audit, today's Gospel from Matthew 25:31-46 is the one to paste on our refrigerator. The following are miscellaneous reflections on the Gospel that is sometimes called the *Great Sermon*.

The first reflection is by Alice Camile.

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."

I sent the Judgment Day Memo back upstairs for a revision. Here's what they came up with: They want ME to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the imprisoned. I said when am I supposed to find time to do all that? They said there's an opportunity every hour of the day. Someone's always hungry for a word of encouragement. Someone who doesn't speak the language always wants a smile and respect. A person caught in a vulnerable conversation is always looking for a bailout. There's always somebody sick at heart or imprisoned by fear not far from my desk.

Why should I do all that, I asked them. I don't even know half of these people, and the other half are, frankly, not my responsibility. Oh, they said, but you do know these people. And they are your responsibility. And you ignore them at your own peril.

The late William Barclay was a Scottish Anglican biblical scholar. His commentaries on the books of the New Testament remain very popular amongst readers. Next week, the First Sunday of Advent, we begin the *Year of Mark*. The Sunday Gospel will be from Mark. Barclay's commentary on Mark would be a wonderful companion for all in small groups and for all individuals who like to study Scripture. William Barclay writes:

This is one of the most vivid parables Jesus ever spoke, and the lesson is crystal clear—that God will judge us in accordance with our reaction to human need. His judgment does not depend on the knowledge we have amassed, or the fame that we have acquired, or the fortune that we have gained, but on the help that we

have given. And there are certain things which this parable teaches us about the help which we must give.

1) It must be help in simple things. The things which Jesus picks out—giving a hungry person a meal, or a thirsty person a drink, welcoming a stranger, cheering the sick, visiting the prisoner—are things which anyone can do. It is not a question of giving away huge sums of money, or of writing our names in the annals of history; it is a case of giving simple help to the people we meet every day. There never was a parable which so opened the way to glory to us all.

2) It must be help which is uncalculating. Those who helped did not think that they were helping Christ and thus piling up eternal merit; they helped because they could not stop themselves. It was the natural, instinctive, quite uncalculating reaction of the loving heart. Whereas, on the other hand, the attitude of those who failed to help was: "If we had known it was you we would gladly have helped; but we thought it was only some insignificant person who was not worth helping." It is still true that there are those who will help if they are given praise and thanks and publicity; but to help like that is not to help, it is to pander to self-esteem. Such help is not generosity; it is disguised selfishness. The help which wins the approval of God is that which is given for nothing but the sake of helping.

3) Jesus confronts us with the wonderful truth that all such help given is given to himself; in contrast, all such help withheld is withheld from himself. How can that be? If we really wish to bring delight to those who are parents, if we really wish to move them to gratitude, the best way to do it is to help their children. God is the great Father; and the way to delight the heart of God is to help his children, our fellow men and women.

There were two men who found this parable blessedly true, the one was Francis of Assisi, he was wealthy and high-born and high-spirited. But he was not happy. He felt that life was incomplete. Then one day he was out riding and met a leper, loathsome and repulsive in the ugliness of his disease. Something moved Francis to dismount and fling his arms around this wretched sufferer; and in his arms the face of the leper changed to the face of Christ.

The other was Martin of Tours. He was a Roman soldier and a Christian. One cold winter day, as he was entering a city, a beggar stopped him and asked for alms. Martin had no money; but the beggar was blue and shivering with cold, and Martin gave what he had. He took off his soldier's coat, worn and frayed as it was; he cut it in two and gave half of it to the beggar man. That night he had a dream. In it he saw the heavenly places and all the angels and Jesus among them; and Jesus was wearing half of a Roman soldier's cloak. One of the angels said to him: "Master, why are you wearing that battered old cloak? Who gave it to you?" And Jesus answered softly: "My servant Martin gave it to me."

When we learn the generosity which without calculation helps others in the simplest things, we too will know the joy of helping Jesus Christ himself.

Two More Stories

1) In the year 1880 in Paris, a rather poorly dressed priest showed up at a presbytery looking for a night's lodgings. He had come all the way from Turin, in Italy, and was trying to raise funds to build a church. The visitor's name was John Bosco, but this meant nothing to the resident priest, so he put him in the attic. Many years later when John Bosco was declared a saint by the Church, the priest said, "Had I known it was John Bosco, I would not have put him in the attic; I would have given him the best room in the house."

We never know exactly who it is we are meeting in the person of our neighbor. But this is not important. What is important is that we see in that person a needy human being, and that we do our best to meet his need. For those with faith, behind the face, no matter how strange, the face of Christ lies hidden.

2) Leo Tolstoy the great Russian author, was also a Christian who took seriously the demands of the Great Sermon (Matthew 5-7) and attempted to live his life accordingly. One day, a beggar stopped him while he was out walking and asked him for alms. Tolstoy searched his pockets for a coin but, finding none, he said with regret, "Please don't be angry with me, my brother, but I have nothing with me, if I did, I would gladly give it to you." At that, the beggar's face brightened with joy. "You have given me more than I asked for," he said, "you have called me brother!" Tolstoy had not only grasped the intent of the Great Sermon but he had also penetrated the truth of today's Gospel. He regarded the poor man asking him for alms as a brother because he had understood and made his own the great commandment (Matthew

22:37). But, he had also learned to see the face of Christ in the poor and, because of that insight, he met the criteria of judgment set forth for our consideration in today's gospel.

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta writes:

Many today are starving for ordinary bread.

**But there is another kind of hunger—
the hunger to be wanted, to be loved,
to be recognized.**

**Nakedness too is not just the want of clothes,
but also about loss of dignity, purity,
and self-respect.**

**And homelessness is not just want of a house;
there is the homelessness of being rejected,
of being unwanted in a throwaway society.**

**The biggest disease in the world today is the
feeling of being unwanted and uncared for.**

**The greatest evil in the world is lack of love,
the terrible indifference towards one's
neighbor.**

**Lord, warm our cold hearts with your grace,
so that we your disciples may produce
the fruits of love.**

Preparing for the ultimate audit

Patricia Sanchez shares this reflection on today's Gospel:

Audit—a dreaded idea by most accounts, this five-letter word packs enough emotional and psychological power to cause even the most stalwart of shoulders to sag. The very prospect of someone else scrutinizing our financial records to assess whether or not we have disbursed our funds and made just and honest use of our assets has very little appeal. However, this is precisely the prospect on which today's gospel hinges. Appealing or not, the Matthean Jesus instructs us that, upon his return in glory, each of us will be called to render an account of ourselves and how well or poorly we have made use of our material blessings; in other words, we shall be faced with life's ultimate audit.

One means of assessing how well we are following Jesus' lead may be as near as our checkbook or monthly budget records. In light of the challenge of today's gospel, contemporary disciples of Jesus might conduct a personal inventory of sorts. For example, how much do we spend on fast food as compared to how much of our treasure do we assign to feeding the

hungry. Or...how much have we spent on movies, golf, and other recreational entertainment as opposed to what we've set aside for the unclothed, the unwashed and the uncared children of God. How much are we willing to pay for leisurely travel and luxurious vacation packages while many of our brothers and sisters do not even have the security of a home address. As these wander the streets and rely on the charity of others for food and shelter, how concerned have we been and how forthcoming have we been in sharing with them our considerable blessings?

We probably reveal our priorities, our values, our selfishness or our love, our faith or lack thereof more often and more consistently through our use of money and material things than in any other way. On this the feast of our master, mentor and king, we are challenged to hold ourselves accountable while we prepare to be held accountable by God at our ultimate audit.

Ways Ascension Reaches Out to the Neighbor in Need

It is very clear from today's Gospel that we will be judged on our response to the poor. The following are some of the ways Ascension responds to the plight of the poor in our midst. No one nation, church or individual (not even Bill Gates) can heal all the brokenness in our world. But we can do our bit. As you will see from the following, Ascension does a lot of reaching out.

Thrift Store. From January to October '17, our wonderful volunteers at the Thrift Store helped to raise \$378,075. From this, \$254,000 was given to Social Concerns. A big thank you to John Casco for coordinating this ministry.

Social Concerns. To date this year, Social Concerns has seen 6,221 families and has spent \$383,222. A big thank you to Olga & Jerry Kelly and all the other wonderful volunteers.

Tithe Money. The 2016-2017 tithe donations were \$110,500 to help the hurting neighbors at home and abroad.

Ecumenical Efforts. Ascension participates in four organizations/ministries that reach out to the poor: *Habitat for Humanity*—building homes locally for the poor. We participate with funds and volunteers.

Daily Bread. Daily Bread serves between 200 and 250 luncheon meals each day of the year to the low-income poor and homeless at its soup kitchen on Fee Avenue in downtown Melbourne. Ascension volunteers serve at the kitchen on various days during the month.

Habitat for Humanity. A nonprofit, ecumenical, Christian housing organization building simple, decent, affordable housing in partnership with people in need. We thank John and Cathy Miller for coordinating Ascension's participation in Habitat Projects.

Community of Hope. Provides transitional housing for homeless families.

JustFaith. JustFaith is a small community program of formation in spirituality and the Church's social justice teachings. JustFaith welcomes parishioners to a service of Prayer for the Poor 6:00 - 6:30pm every Tuesday evening.

Have a blessed week,

