

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last week we heard the story of the prodigal son returning home to his father. This week we hear the story of the last judgment. Yesterday we prayed for the departed. It does not matter whether they are holy people that we prayed for or not, they still deserve and need our prayers. Some will say why should I pray for somebody whom I did not love or did not love me. In today's Gospel we are told to love everybody as if they were Christ. Therefore, we pray for people whom we do not know. We are to love as Christ teaches us to love.

Sometimes people say why should we pray for the dead? In the Old Testament there is one clear scriptural precedent for praying for the dead. This is the example of Judas Maccabeus, leader of the Jewish revolt against Emperor Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 B.C., we see where Judas Maccabeus prayed for and offered a sin offering for some of his soldiers who had fallen in battle. The text says, "In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection" (2 Maccabees 12:39-45).

Today's gospel begins with God gathering all the nations before him. By all the nations Jesus means all people. He separates those who will be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven from those who will go into eternal damnation.

This teaching brings to mind the parable about the farmer who planted good seed but weeds grew among the good seed; Matthew 13:24 - 30. "Jesus also presented them another parable, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. While people slept, his enemy came and also sowed weed seeds among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and brought forth fruit, the weeds also appeared. The slaves of the householder came [forward] and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where did these weeds come from?' The man said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves then asked him, 'Do you want us to go and gather them up?' But the man replied, 'No, for fear that while you gather up the weeds, you might also uproot the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of the harvest I will tell the reapers, "First, gather up the weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

In today's Gospel, the second coming of Christ has occurred. It was now time for the final judgment. God had allowed those who were good and those who were sinners to live in this world together. He expected the people to live according to his will, but as we know not all did.

He separates the people into two groups, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. On his right, He sent the Saints and on His left, He sent the sinners. He called the Saints "sheep" on account of their gentleness, and because they yield fruit and useful things for us, as do sheep, providing wool, which is divine and spiritual protection, and milk which is the sustenance that is needed. The goats are the sinners, for they walk along the precipices and are unruly and fruitless. He tells the people of his right that they

were blessed of his Father and that they were to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. Jesus considers them to be inheritors of the kingdom to show that God makes them participants in His own glory as His sons. He did not say "receive", but rather "inherit" as a man would his father's estate. And then he tells them the standard by which they were judged. We must pay close attention to this for we too will be judged by the same standards. He told them:

I was hungry and you fed me.
I was thirsty and you gave me drink.
I was a stranger and you took me in.
I was naked and you clothed me.
I was sick and you visited me.
I was in prison and you came to me.

Hearing this, the people were confused. They had never seen Jesus in any of these ways, so how could they had done these things to him or for him. Jesus told them: "inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these my brothers you did it to Me." By "the least of these my brothers" he means the poor. For every poor man is Christ's brother for the very reason that Christ, too, spent his life in poverty. Every good thing that they had done to the poor Jesus accepted it as being done to him.

There is a story about St. Martin prior to his being baptized, he was still a catechumen. He was a soldier and had met at the gates of the city of Amiens a scantily dressed beggar for whom he cut in half his military cloak to share it with the beggar. That night he dreamed of Jesus wearing the half cloak that Martin had given away and heard Jesus telling the angels: "Here is Martin, the Roman soldier who was not baptized. He has clad me." Soon he was baptized.

The sinners on his left, he sends into the fire which had been prepared for the devil. For as the demons are without compassion and are cruelly and maliciously disposed towards us, it is fitting that they who are of like mind with them, and who have been cursed by their own deeds, should merit the same punishment. God did not prepare the fire for men, nor did he make hell for us, but for the devil. We make ourselves liable to hell.

Quoting blessed Theophylact he says "Tremble, then, O man, and understand from this that these men were not punished as fornicators, or robbers, or perpetrators of any other vice, but for not having done good. For indeed, if you consider things well, the robber is he who has much and does not give alms, even if he does no obvious injury. For what ever he has in excess of his needs, he has stolen from those who are in need and have not received anything from him. For if he had shared these things with them, they would not be in need. Now that he has locked these things up and kept them for himself, for this very reason they are in need. So he who does not give arms is a robber, doing injustice to all those whom he could have helped but did not, and for this reason he and those like

him shall go away into eternal punishment which never ends; but the righteous shall enter into eternal life."

When our Lord tells a parable he always speaks on two levels. The first is what the words literally mean and the second is the spiritual meaning behind the words. We must feed those in need. We must give drink to those who are thirsty. We must take the strangers in. We must clothe the naked. We must visit the sick. We must visit those in prison. We will be judged according to whether we performed these acts of love. For our Lord has taught us that we must love everyone even those whom we do not know or are members of groups which hate us. If we do not do these things we will be judged as those who were condemned.

We must also look beyond the obvious meanings of these words and looked at their spiritual meaning. Have we taken the strangers whom we meet and invited them to be part of our lives in the church where they will find the love of our Lord? Have we given them a wedding garment which would allow them into the wedding feast, clothing them in baptismal garments so that they may have life? Have we given them drink from the well that will never run dry as our Lord taught the Samaritan woman?

Many people that we meet are sick because they have not learned about our Lord or they've been taught incorrectly about him. We must heal them through correct teaching. And many people that we meet are imprisoned by their way of life which is keeping them from salvation. We must teach them the truth and guide them to our Lord. And once they become part of the body of Christ they'll be fed with the bread of life and drink from the cup of salvation.

We must be willing to do as our Lord taught us through this parable so that when the final judgment comes we will be separated with the sheep and inherited the kingdom promise to us by our Lord.