

November 22nd 2020

Mt 25:31-46

What is wrong with goats? What is your problem, Jesus? I like goats. I like sheep, too, but I like goats.

If I could, I would tell Jesus that. I would also tell him that we reached a new level of anxiety and discouragement in this pandemic time and that we need a lot of things but not talk about judgment. Judgement is not what we need right now. We need a light in the darkness, hope, something to hold on to, something stable and something to hope for.

Well, you could argue, let's get over with this last Sunday of the Christian liturgical year and next week, with the first of Advent, we will focus on our longing for light.

Is that the solution?

Isn't light what we always yearn for? Isn't light what we should always seek as Christians or people of faith? Whether it is Advent or the last Sunday of the Church year, Christ the King, or any other day in the year, isn't it the light we seek and wish to follow?

So, if we don't want to wait for Advent, the time of preparation for the light that comes into the world, and then, eventually, Christmas when we remember and celebrate that God, the light, came into the world and kindled a fire of hope and love here among us, if we don't want to wait for that what, then, shall we do with this text?

Christians, over time, have taken two stands on the issue of the Last Judgement with some gray in between. Either, they used it to threaten believers.

If you don't live like a saint on earth (and, of course, only I can tell you how to live as one), then you will be punished. Or, Christians took the liberal stand on it and did away with the whole idea.

Personally, I believe that we will encounter Christ, the judge, after our life here on earth has ended and that we will look back to our lives together with Christ. I always imagine the Last Judgement a bit like "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens. The old mean and greedy Mr. Scrooge has to face the past, the present and the future and his role in time and the lives of others. It was painful for him to realize what effects his doings had on others. It was painful but after the last visit of one of the Christmas ghosts, he was changed. He was a different person. Like silver refined in fire (Mal 3:3 et al).

Now, who is goat and who is sheep? Instantaneously I can think of some goats. There are dictators and criminals who only care about their power and money and they try to grow on the cost of others. To be honest, I have quite a number of ideas whom I (nota bene: I) would count among the goats.

And like always when it seems very easy to judge and to assign roles in a parable told by Jesus to actual people, the alarm bell should ring. Was it Jesus' intention that I start judging who is goat and who is sheep? And what makes me so sure about me being a sheep? In fact, it is in these moments that I realize how much goat I have in me and I wonder whether something like pure sheep exist at all or whether we are not all a nice and interesting mixture of sheep and goats.

Now, where is the light in this? If we are strong enough to acknowledge that there is quite a bit of goat in all of us, what good news is there in this parable for us?

Do we, after all, have to wait for next Sunday to start looking for the light?

No! The light is what we always seek. The light is what we always seek in every text of Scripture, in every word of God, in every other human being and in every situation in life. Light is what we always seek and yearn for.

In this parable of the Last Judgment, who is the judge?

The judge is Christ! The judge is the same God who in love created us, called us into being, became human for us, died for us and never grew tired to promise us unconditional and unfailing love. The judge is the pure light, the outpoured love of God.

Is the judgement something to fear? No.

Will it be painful? Maybe. If I have to encounter all my actions again and their effects on others, every evil word, every time I acted for my own benefit, I am pretty sure that will be very painful for me.

But it will happen in the presence of the light, of Christ who is love, and in this process we'll leave behind what makes our hearts heavy and at the end of that process we will become part of that light ourselves.

Jesus has taken the judgment on himself so that we can live our lives free from fear and full of overflowing hope and light which Christ calls us to share with others in abundance.

Let us go into the darkness and share our light as self-aware and hopeful goaty sheep. Amen.