

**YOU DID IT FOR ME**  
**Sermon for the Last Day of the Church Year, 2020**  
**Matthew 25:31-46**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is taken from Matthew 25:31-46, the Gospel we just heard read: <sup>31</sup> **“When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> All nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them from one another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup> and He will have the sheep stand at His right but the goats at His left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those at His right, ‘Come, you whom My Father has blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the time when the world was created! <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me a drink. I was a stranger, and you took Me into your homes; <sup>36</sup> naked, and you gave Me something to wear; sick, and you looked after Me; in prison, and you visited Me.’**

<sup>37</sup> **“Then the righteous will ask Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You a drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see You a stranger and take You into our homes, or naked and give You something to wear? <sup>39</sup> When did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?’**

<sup>40</sup> **“Then the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I tell you, anything you have done for one of My brothers here, even the least important of them, you have done for Me.’**

<sup>41</sup> **“Then He will say to those at His left, ‘Go away from Me, you cursed ones, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels! <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; thirsty, and you did not give Me a drink; <sup>43</sup> a stranger, and you did not take Me into your homes; naked, and you did not give Me anything to wear; sick and in prison, and you did not look after Me.’**

<sup>44</sup> **“Then they also will ask, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not help You?’**

<sup>45</sup> **“Then He will answer them, ‘Truly, I tell you, anything you have not done for one of these, even the least important of them, you have not done for Me.’**

<sup>46</sup> **“Then these will go away to everlasting punishment, but the righteous to everlasting life.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

**“When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. All nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them from one another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and He will have the sheep stand at His right but the goats at His left.”** This judgment scene takes us back to Daniel’s vision of the Ancient of Days, seated on His glorious throne where Daniel describes his vision like this: *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed”* (Dan. 7:13-14).

The separation of the sheep from the goats is complete, the judgment of the court is announced, and it’s all over. People go either to heaven or to hell. There are no appeals, no extenuating circumstances or matters in mitigation. There is no time to hear character witnesses and no consideration for good intentions, any alibis or excuses. There’s no *“I tried to, I wanted to, I meant to but for reasons beyond my control I couldn’t,”* and there is no middle ground, no such place like purgatory. No, you will stand on either the right or the left, the sentence will be passed, and then it will all be over - forever.

When this happens, and it will, will we stand as sheep or goats? Surely on the side of the sheep. Let’s look at the criteria our Lord uses for judgment. Have you fed the hungry? Given drink to the thirsty? Taken in strangers? Clothed the naked? Visited and cared for the sick and those in prison? Isn’t it apparent that the King thinks these are vitality important activities; so where do they rate on our priority list? Knowing that’s how Jesus judges, how much stress have we put on doing them?

Some may think, *“I’ve helped give food to the poor. I’ve donated money to children’s charities so they can feed those poor starving children. I’ve come across people in my life who need a bit of change, and I’ve immediately helped out by giving them a few dollars. Maybe that person has used the money I gave him to buy a drink. I’ve put up people who have been strangers to me, exchange students, even relatives that I didn’t know I had. I’ve clothed naked people since I give all my old clothes to Lifeline or St. Vincent’s. I’ve visited sick people, but maybe I have to admit that I haven’t visited anyone in prison.”* After all this though, is

there still that uncomfortable feeling that this is still not enough? If these are the standards of judgment, maybe we really ought to be standing with that unhappy lot on the Lord's left side?

*“But hang on a minute, the Bible states that we are saved by grace through faith alone and not by the works we do. But now we hear that when Jesus comes to judge the earth, there's not even any mention of our faith. When Jesus passes sentence, is He only going to look at what we did or failed to do? All this time we have built our faith through worship, reading the Bible, and the partaking of the Sacraments - but now it seems that all this time we should have been getting out there and helping the poor and needy because that's how we're going to be judged.”*

Before we begin to think like that, look again at the Gospel lesson today, because this text is teaching salvation by faith alone in Christ Jesus, and definitely not by anything we do.

Take notice that the ones who Jesus calls “**righteous**” are completely unaware of the good they have done. They are genuinely surprised to hear Jesus commending them for their deeds of compassion. With bewilderment they ask, “**Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You a drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You into our homes, or naked and give You something to wear? When did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?**”

The last thing they are doing is standing there trying to come up with a flimsy list of scattered incidents to justify the words of commendation Jesus has showered on them. They really don't know what He's talking about. That's because the righteous are, above all else, not aware of any good in themselves. Instead, they are conscious of their own shortcomings. With St. Paul they confess, “*the willingness is present with me but doing what is good is not*” (Romans 7:18). They know that they have no trophies or achievements worthy to lie at the Lord's feet. They look at their lives and actions and can see only the evil they did. They see the opportunities they lost, the times they failed to do the things He mentioned. They know that before the Lord, their most significant accomplishments are but filthy rags.<sup>1</sup>

It's precisely because they see things this way that they have despaired of saving themselves by their own efforts and have instead put their trust in what Christ has done to save them. Their focus has been on Jesus: His righteousness, His suffering for them, His death, and His resurrection - all for them. They have been living by *faith* in the Lord Jesus - and living by faith something remarkable has been happening to them that they've been largely unaware of. Without faith it is impossible to do anything to please God<sup>2</sup>; but with faith, because of the indwelling of the Spirit of God in those who believe, Christ has worked through their human bodies and spirits to accomplish His goodwill in the world. He has been changing their hearts to be compassionate like He is - and so as they've gone along they have been doing His will, but it has been second nature to them so that they've done it without even thinking about it.

What have they done? Exactly what Jesus says they've done: they've treated others, especially others in need, with Christian kindness and compassion. As a matter of fact, if you look again at the list of things Jesus names, it sounds a lot like the *vocation of every Christian parent*, after all, what parent doesn't feed their child when he is hungry, give him a drink when he's thirsty, welcomes him as a stranger into the home when he's born, clothes him, and takes care of him when he's sick? Sometimes when the child needs discipline, it can even be said that the parent visits and encourages him in “prison.” It's on a small scale, to be sure, but the faith of the parent sanctifies these things we consider routine parental duties so that they become works acceptable and pleasing to the Lord. However, this is not only limited to Christian parents. This is only an example to show that the sorts of things we do every day in our work and for our families because we are motivated by the Spirit of Christ - things we do automatically, without thinking about it - become the very acts of love and compassion that the Lord would have us do. Of course, it goes without saying too that we should make a conscious effort to reach out to others who are in particular need when we see them. As the Lord gives us an opportunity and the resources, we should and do respond to people's problems, and the Lord certainly gives us plenty of opportunities to do so.

The world is filled with people in need. We have only to open our eyes to see them. There is no shortage of people who need help. There are a lot of them much closer to home: people in our own community who are in need, who are struggling to get by but who are nevertheless continually losing ground and sinking steadily into poor health, debt, and despair. There's much we can do to help - but at the same time, it's necessary to say that some people are helped best by not assisting them directly. They've been “helped” so much that they have learned to be dependent on handouts and so have never learned to take responsibility for themselves; so we want to be wise in the distribution of the resources the Lord entrusts to our care.

But there is also a spiritual dimension to all of this. We have been speaking primarily of physical needs: hunger, thirst, nakedness, and so on. But people can be spiritually hungry, thirsty, estranged, naked, sick, and in prison. In fact, these kinds of needs can be far more severe and pressing than anything in the physical realm. On top of it, they have eternal consequences, unlike their physical counterparts, and only we Christians can respond effectively to these sorts of needs.

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 64:6

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 11:6

Dear friends, every single one of us has been equipped to feed hungry souls with God's Word, which is the Bread of Life. We can offer the Water of Life to people thirsting for real meaning and joy in their lives by sharing our faith in the Lord Jesus. We can invite and welcome people who are strangers to God into the household and family of faith. To people who are ashamed of themselves, whose souls are naked and their sins exposed to the world, we can give the white robe of Christ's righteousness that covers all shame and disgrace. To human souls that are sick with envy, pride, hate, and other spiritual diseases, and to those trapped in dungeons of guilt and temptation, we can bring the cure to heal and the key to release them. The point is that as we walk along with Christ, and continue in His Word, we are doing these things. Are we doing them as well as we could be? No, certainly not. We fall short, and where we fall short, we ask for the Lord's forgiveness and the power of the Spirit to do better. That will draw us closer to the Lord so that He can better work in us to do His will.

In this way we shall serve Him and do the things He wants us to do. What's even more remarkable is the one who will be the receiver of our work for the Lord. Jesus says, "**I was hungry... I was thirsty... I was a stranger... naked... sick... in prison.**" Listen to what He's saying: whenever a member of the body of Christ suffers, it is Christ Himself who suffers. It is He who bears all our grief's, and sins, and sorrows. He is present and hidden in all of our afflictions. That's a profound truth, but it is the very heart of what it means to say that Christ is our Saviour from sin and all its consequences. Our problems are His problems.

That should change the way we think about things. Look around. Who do we know who is in need, either physically or spiritually? We need to ask ourselves, "*How can I help?*" and then do it as the Lord directs our heart, and here's what's amazing: we see the Lord in our brother's need - and he will see the Lord in our response to his need because it is Christ in us that moves us with love and compassion to act. Of course, we can reverse that: we need to see Christ in our own afflictions and see Him in others who offer their help to us.

In this way, the collective body of Christ is preserved and cared for by Him whose Spirit dwells within us. As we share our sorrows and bear one another's burdens, we are, in a sense, Christ to each other. The things that He is doing in the world He lays to our credit so that He can say, "**You did it for Me.**"

May He keep us in this true faith that relying on His mercy we can be His willing hands in the world doing the good He would have us do, until He comes again in glory and says to us, "**Come, you whom My Father has blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the time when the world was created!**" Then, with all the saints on His right hand, we shall be able to respond, "*Yes, thank You Lord Jesus. You did it for me.*" Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

Heavenly Father, we love and praise You because You have saved us and called us to be Your own people, not because of what we are or have done, but because of Your mercy and grace. In Jesus Christ You planned our salvation before the beginning of time, and revealed it to us in His first coming. We praise You for all Your daily goodness, but especially for giving Jesus for us to suffer, die, and rise again, destroying death and giving us eternal life.

Grant us Your grace that we may remain to the end in the saving truth of Your Word, produce the fruits of faith, hope, and love, and finally receive the crown of righteousness on that great day when Jesus comes again. Continue to protect us from all the errors, lies, false security, and empty wisdom of this world. Strengthen us to live in peace and holiness with all people, to endure humbly whatever we have to face because we are Your children, and to pray fervently in every time of temptation. Make us aware of the signs of the last times, and help us to focus our eyes on the home above that will one day be ours.

Make Your Church strong, O Father. Give it power to fight the good fight of faith with eager determination. Give us faithful pastors who know Christ, and whom Christ will know on His return. Grant that our young people may be equipped to serve You and their fellowmen in every useful and honourable career. Bless all people who serve the needy. Graciously enable all parents to teach their children the way of life in Christ Jesus, that the young may remain faithful to their Lord to the end.

Rule and direct the nations of the earth that they may turn from darkness to Your light. Protect and defend our own land. Lead those who are guilty of wickedness, immorality, and materialism to repent. Put down all evil in our society and let Your Word triumph, that truth and godliness may hold sway.

Hear the cries of the needy, and come to their aid. Strengthen the weak, comfort the depressed, and heal the sick. Help them to accept their situation with trust in Your love, and build up their joy and hope. Keep us all strong in faith, that we may look with joy for the return of our Lord. To Him, with You and the Holy Spirit, be honour, glory, and power for ever. Amen.

**The Last Sunday of the Church Year**

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

<sup>11</sup> For this is what the Lord GOD has said: “Look! I Myself shall search for My sheep and look after them. <sup>12</sup> As a shepherd cares for his flock when he is among his scattered sheep, so I shall look after My sheep. I shall rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a cloudy and very gloomy day. <sup>13</sup> I shall bring them out from the peoples, gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land. I shall be a shepherd to them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the inhabited places of the land. <sup>14</sup> I shall look after them in good pasture, and their grazing-land will be on the mountain-heights of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing-land and graze in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup> I Myself shall shepherd My sheep and I Myself shall let them lie down,” declares the Lord GOD.

<sup>16</sup> “I shall search for the lost ones, bring back those that have been scattered, bandage the injured ones and strengthen the sick ones. I shall destroy the ones that are fat and the strong. I shall shepherd them with justice.” ...

<sup>20</sup> Therefore, this is what the Lord GOD has said to them: “Look! I, yes, I Myself, shall judge between a fat sheep and a lean sheep. <sup>21</sup> Because you shove with your sides and shoulders and butt all the weak animals away with your horns until you have scattered them to the outside, <sup>22</sup> I shall save My flock, that they may not be something to plunder any longer. I shall judge between one sheep and another.

<sup>23</sup> “I shall appoint one Shepherd over them, My Servant David, and He will shepherd them. He will take care of them and He Himself will be their Shepherd. <sup>24</sup> I Myself, the LORD, shall be their God, and My Servant David will be the Prince among them. I Myself, the LORD, have spoken.”

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

<sup>20</sup> However, now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a man. <sup>22</sup> For, as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup> However, each one in his own turn: Christ is the first-fruits. After that, when He comes, those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God, the Father, after He has put an end to all dominion, authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For He must reign until God has put all His enemies under His feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> For “He has put all things under His feet.” However, when He says, “All things have been put under Him,” plainly this

does not include the One who has put everything under Christ. <sup>28</sup> However, when all things have been put under Him, then the Son Himself will also be put under the One who has put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> All nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them from one another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will have the sheep stand at His right but the goats at His left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those at His right, ‘Come, you whom My Father has blessed! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the time when the world was created! <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me a drink. I was a stranger, and you took Me into your homes, <sup>36</sup> naked, and you gave Me something to wear, sick, and you looked after Me, in prison, and you visited Me.’

<sup>37</sup> “Then the righteous ones will ask Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You or thirsty and give You a drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see You a stranger and take You into our homes or naked and give You something to wear? <sup>39</sup> When did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?’

<sup>40</sup> “Then the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I tell you, anything you have done for one of My brothers here, even the least important of them, you have done for Me.’

<sup>41</sup> “Then He will say to those at His left, ‘Go away from Me, cursed ones, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels! <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat, thirsty, and you did not give Me a drink, <sup>43</sup> a stranger, and you did not take Me into your homes, naked, and you did not give Me anything to wear, sick and in prison, and you did not look after Me.’

<sup>44</sup> “Then they also will ask, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not help You?’

<sup>45</sup> “Then He will answer them, ‘Truly, I tell you, anything you have not done for one of these, even the least important of them, you have not done for Me.’

<sup>46</sup> “Then these will go away to everlasting punishment, but the righteous ones to everlasting life.”