

INNER VIEWS
The Judgment (Mt. 25:31-46)

The Son of Man will separate the sheep from the goats
And the sheep will ask,
'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you?'

Jesus is coming back, but only if we let him.

We need him to walk the earth again. But this time he will walk the earth through us and the way we live our lives. That's the point of Jesus' Resurrection; Jesus continues on earth through his followers. His original followers began to realize that his spirit was alive within them. It's not simply that they were inspired to follow his example or to imitate him. Its far more basic and concrete – Jesus lives as the source of our living energy- because he is the revelation, the Word, of the Father and in his death he was released into our lives- no longer limited to one time and one place.

Jesus continues to come through our lives and with his coming there is a judgment, but not in the way we think of "Last Judgment." The first thing to know is that "Last" also means ultimate. It's the final word on the meaning and purpose of our lives. And it's a judgment in the sense of being a discernment. It separates the sheep from the goats, which means its meant to help us be aware of what is life giving in contrast to what creates hell on earth. Judgment, from Jesus' perspective, is meant to awaken us to the truth, to the divine reality that we all share and must learn to nurture.

We respond through faith, through the conviction that something good and powerful will happen in this world because of God's compassion, love and mercy. It is the conviction in and to the Father of Jesus as the source of all true and good possibilities. Faith seeps into us and refashions us through our relationship to Jesus through which we catch his experience and awareness of the Father's love in this world. Faith is a dedication to, an awareness of and an empowerment by the truth of reality – the truth that God is its ultimate Source as well as its final judgment. God's judgment reveals what is life giving and love expressing.

To understand this approach to faith we need to look at the history out of which the beliefs we grew up came. It was a medieval theology that developed in reaction to the Black Plague. The Plague killed two-thirds of the known population and left the people devastated and depressed. It was obvious to them that there was not much hope for this world. And that left them with the world to come – heaven. The emphasis focused on getting into the next world in a state of grace. The great cathedrals of France were built to represent in its architectural dimensions of stone and mortar the heavenly Temple of Jerusalem on earth. They physically soared into the heavens and metaphorically lifted us up into life after death.

And the image of God, as well as that of Jesus, was fashioned out of a philosophical metaphysics of the God who dwelled in resplendent glory, far from the mud and grime of medieval Europe. We endowed God with all the abstract qualities of divine perfection. God was all powerful, all knowing and most of all, all just. And Jesus wasn't far behind. Even though the doctrine of the

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church declared Jesus to be truly human as well as truly divine, the Jesus of medieval theology emphasized his divinity. And it turned his humanity into a kind of divine play acting – God acting in our human guise. Jesus became less recognizable as one of us, his humanity hidden behind the cloak of divine nature. At a time when this world seemed hopeless the only other possibility for hope was in a divinely other world.

I think that much of what is going on in the church and world today comes from a shift in the possibility of hope. We believe there is hope in this world. Those who by nature love the past see this hope as naive. But I believe it is the Holy Spirit moving us to a more inclusive and integrated reality – the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed. As we pray in the “Our Father” ‘may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’ The kingdom of God is the coming together of heaven and earth. It is not something that we can bring about. But it is a gift of God’s grace. It is coming alive because of the action of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit in our world. It is offering us the possibility of evolving (or transforming) by a salvation that makes a real difference in *this* concrete world in which we live. And in my mind the best indication that this is true is our modern expectation that our beliefs and values affect the way in which we live. We expect this of our leaders because we expect it of ourselves. We expect our faith in Jesus to actually effect who we become and how we live our values. We judge a person’s beliefs by who they have become.

Once we are aware of this difference in world view we are able to look at the scriptures in a different light. We begin to see the insight and wisdom of the divine Son who is truly one of us. We begin to see Jesus as the revelation and possibility of our best selves. He is far more intimate to our daily lives, no longer the heavenly divine Son whom we can only implore. We begin to see his human living as the revelation of the Father intimately gracing our lives.

As the Word who reveals our shared humanity, as the expression of the Father, we would have to conclude that *our* God, the God revealed in Jesus’ life, does not want to be served by us, but actually serves us. We exist because God loves us into existence. And when we continue to look at Jesus we realize that God doesn’t care about categories like “all powerful, and all knowing” The Father seen in Jesus takes the lowest place, right in the midst of the poor and weak. This God is irrevocably committed to freeing us from the wounds that we call sin by being compassionate love working in and through our lives.

If this is a true picture of God, then God is more truly human, more thoroughly humane, than any human being. – a supremely human God. In coming intimately close to us and our humanness God transforms our actual possibilities. And God does all of this so spontaneously within our nature that we don’t even know it. Notice that the sheep didn’t even know how they had responded to Jesus; “When did we see you hungry and feed you...?” And as goats we have another type of unknowing, of being lost in an illusion of separation from one another and the divine presence of one another. But more about that next week.

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Here is a translation of one of the Psalms from the Hebrew Testament. It is taken from the book “Psalms for Praying An Invitation to Wholeness, “ translated by Nan C. Merrill. It’s a prayer poem that you can pray over and over again.

Psalm 55

Give ear to my prayer, O Beloved, and hide not from my supplication!
 Listen to me, and answer me; for I am overwhelmed by anxiety,
 I am tormented by the wily voice of my doubts;
 the oppression of my illusions confuse me.
 They keep me bound in a prison, and , like bad company,
 they enclose me in darkness.
 My hear is in anguish within me, thoughts of death keep me company,
 I spend my hours in fear and trembling, and despair never leaves me.
 O that I had wings like a dove!
 I would fly away and be at rest; I would flee far from my fears,
 I would lodge in the country, I would hasten to find shelter
 from the raging doubts and anger,
 stand with me, O Beloved, clear all the confusion that dwells within;
 for darkness and conflict dwell within my soul.
 Day and night fears attack without warning;
 My heart is weak in the midst of this suffering, the end seems near at hand.
 Oppression and ignorance do not depart where truth is a stranger.
 It is not a specific doubt that taunts me –then I could bear it;
 It ist not a known fear that rises up within – then I could face it.
 No, in my deepest being, I feel that you have abandoned me.
 We use to hold sweet converse together; within the Silence we walked in harmony and peace.
 Let my prayer be heard, O Comforter.
 Listen to me, and answer me; for, I cry out to You in the midst of my pain!
 Yes, I call upon the Beloved, knowing that Love will heed my cry.
 From morning through the evening I moan in my loneliness, and surrender myself to Love.
 The Beloved will deliver my soul in safety and give me strength to search within, to find the
 source of my fear.
 Loves’ presence will make itself known to me, bringing comfort and stilling this disquiet within.
 With gentle and tender guidance I shall find my way Home.
 Fear and doubt sought to capture me, weaving webs of confusion, breeding lairs of anxiety.
 Sowing false seeds of empty promises, they sought to take control/
 Yet You, O Beloved, were ever near, waiting for me to call upon You.
 I offered my fears up to the Beloved, and Love heard my cry;
 I sought the One who ever listens; once again, I knew Love’s Presence.
 Yes, You, O Beloved, bring my fears to the fore, exposing them to the Light;
 I abandon myself into your hands.
 Into your Heart I commend my soul, in You will I place my heart.

How to read the Gospels

When you listen to a preacher interpreting a scripture passage it’s like listening to a pundit from MSNBC or Fox news. They often start with a point of view and use the scripture to support their point. As one of our Redemptorist Missionaries knowingly quipped, “I don’t let the Gospels get

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in the way of what I want to say.” It takes a great deal of study and a life time of prayerful reflection to learn to come to the scriptures with the openness Jesus intended. The only way to truly hear his meaning is to gradually be taught to see and live from his perspective. This is why he left us the Holy Spirit: “I have to go so that the Spirit may come....” (Jn 167)

The Gospel’s intention is to involve us in the life, story, meaning and perspective of Jesus. IT is far more than gaining knowledge about Jesus. The Gospels will gradually awaken us to his experience, understanding and wisdom. This is his revelation – not facts and ideas but a way of relating to the Divine dimension of all Creation that profoundly informs our relationship to one another. The gospels draw us into a process of awakening to Jesus’ awareness of the spiritual reality of our being.

Scriptures are based on experience, not concepts and ideas. They come from the experience of gradually awakening to the Father love and being taught by the Spirit to love one another as Jesus does. This is a deeply intimate connection that ultimately brings us to the treasure and freedom we long for, in which there is nothing we must prove, nothing we must protect, where “I am who I am” in the unconditional love of God. The gift and revelation of the gospel is incredible, personal, communal and concrete, all at the same time.

Jesus is the Divine/Human Son of the Father. We must keep this tension, the union of heaven and earth, central in our listening to the Word and his human stories. When we over emphasize the divinity of Christ we lose the reality of his humanity. And when we overemphasize the humanity of Jesus we lose the mystical dimension of his consciousness. As a theology professor summed it up, “In the divinity of Christ we know everything there is to know about our humanity. And in the humanity of Jesus we come to know everything we can know about our divinity.” Or as St. Athanasius put it “The Son of God became human so that humans might become God.”

The historical Jesus has much insight to give us about how Jesus developed, learned, and grew in wisdom, in stature and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52)). The mystical and divine dimension of Jesus keeps us alert to the divine reality that is the center of our humanity as well as the spiritual depth of our being. When we lose the mystical dimension of Jesus we end up with an ego centric and psychological approach that robs us of our divine and spiritual depths. Jesus’ attitude and consciousness is human, he experiences and reacts the same way we do. He grows and learns and matures just as we do, by dealing with his life situations. In John’s gospel he is profoundly affected by the women in his life. Read the story of Cana (John 2) and you see a Jesus who is still learning to put his beliefs into action. When his mother tells him, “Son, they have no more wine,” he responds, “What does that have to do with me. My time has not yet come.” Like a wise mother she turns to the wine stewards and tells them “Do what he tells you.” She’s knows it’s time for him to act, even if he doesn’t.

When he meets the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) he is still gripped by the historical Jewish disdain for Samaritans. By the time their encounter is over, she has argued with him, and he has come to realize that his Father has room in his house for all his children. Much the same thing happens with the Canaanite woman who tells him that “even the dogs get the scraps from the table. (Mt. 15:27).” And her quip awakens within him a compassion for people in need, no

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matter what their national background. The Gospels will do the same thing to our lives if we let them.

When we read the scriptures there are no superfluous words. Every detail has a reason for being there. But what the four Gospels have in common is that they are revealing creation from the point of view of Jesus' consciousness, an experience of intimacy with the Father, as it is experienced and struggled with in the lives of the various gospel communities.

Our religious upbringing has taught us to read scriptures as morality lectures. They portray Jesus as scolding us for not doing well enough, or from a more positive point of view teaches us how to please God more fully. They seem to demand change on our part as the price of God's love. This has the unfortunate implication that we are the center of our lives. It stresses our egoic mind and will as the primary source of our moral worth, which focuses our lives on saving ourselves. This short circuits Jesus' basic message – risk all for love, give yourself over to God's unconditional love as the source of your love for one another.

Let me quote a modern theologian (Ilia Delio – *The Humility of God*) who puts this very clearly:

How can we look at the Biblical text in a manner that will convert us or change us? I am going to define the Bible in a new way for some of you. *The Bible is an honest conversation with humanity about where power really is (i.e. the foundation of reality)*. All spiritual texts, including the Bible, are books whose primary focus lies outside of themselves, in the Holy Mystery. The Bible is to illuminate your human experience through struggling with it. It is not a substitute for human experience. It is an invitation into the struggle itself—you are supposed to be bothered by some of the texts. Human beings come to consciousness by struggle, and most especially struggle with God and sacred texts. We largely remain unconscious if we avoid all conflicts, dilemmas, paradoxes, inconsistencies, or contradictions.

The scriptures were not intended to be a historical or factual description of what happened. They are about the *meaning* of what the followers of Jesus experienced. And for them meaning is always about the presence of God working in the concrete realities of our life. The Bible is filled with conflicts, and paradoxes as well as historical inaccuracies. In one book we read contradictions of what we have read in another. Yet it is in struggling with these conflicts that we grow up – not by avoiding them and glossing them over with simplistic explanations. Instead we are meant to have our point of view cracked open by the struggles. Think of Jesus, the divine Son, dying on a cross and you will know firsthand the mental conflicts created by his life. Think of the hope the disciples placed in this “messiah” who they saw heal people, and feed crowds, and who they hoped would lead them to prosperity and power and prestige. Then read the account of his temptations in the desert. He had to face what they faced after his death. And only after his death did they begin to learn the meaning of what he faced. It was only when they lost hope in all that they had dreamed about that they found, as did Jesus, the Divine Intimacy that actually sustained them. The more we allow these scriptures to cultivate our relationship with the Father through the Son, and continuously evolving through the Spirit, do we find ourselves more generous, accepting and willing to let God be the Source of our lives. This means we have allowed the story of Jesus begin to reveal the meaning of our lives.

Understanding the Gospels

When Jesus turned and saw them following he said to them. “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi... where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see!” (John 1:38-39a)

“Come and see... Come with me. Come walk with me and learn as we go. It’s not about learning about me. It’s about being together in a relationship that will allow you to catch my awareness of who we are because of who our Father is.

When you come with me you’ll have to learn for yourself. I’m not going to just give you information. That’s not enough. “I will give you the love that my Father has given me... (John 17:26 14”16-17). You have to bring your whole personality: your point of view; your questions; your fears and resistances; your beliefs and values; your intuition; your awareness, both mental and sensual. You learn from the inside out. You’ll have to question for yourself; ponder, feel lost, be everything you are and learn that our Father is with us at every moment along the way. This is how our Father teaches us.

Let me tell you a story about how it is:’

“Imagine a sower going out to sow. Now it happened that, as he sowed, some of the seed fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground where it found little soil and sprang up straightaway, because there was no depth of earth; and when the sun came up it was scorched and, not having any roots, it withered away. Some seed fell into thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it produced no crop. And some seeds fell into rich soil and, growing tall and strong, produced crop; and yielded thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold. And he said, ‘Listen, anyone who has ears to hear!: (Mark 4:1-7).

This is most often read from a moral perspective as a description of different people and their reaction to Jesus’ revelatory teaching. It’s basically read as setting up a set of criteria as to how we must respond; as if we just need to know what is right and then do it.

But as you walk with Jesus you may realize that he doesn’t make these simplistic judgments. What if all the varied responses to the word / seed were contained in one person? At different times in my life, in different circumstances I’ve responded in all these ways.

There are times I resist, times I just miss the point, and times when I’m inspired, not just to an insight but to action. And there are even times when the word takes root and changes not only my way of perceiving reality but roots me in the deeper divine compassion that is the Source of my living. It seems to me that I need to be aware and accept all these realities to get to the point in my life where grace can do its work. And I’m sure there is more in store for me. All of this is part of a necessary process, a spiritual unfolding of my relationship to Father, Son and Spirit. There’s a shift in focus here, a shift from my being the center of my life to God being present in all the moments of my life. When I’m the center I end up being self-centered. It’s all about me. When God is the center I grow in gratitude and trust and the story takes root in my spirit.

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I'm guessing that Jesus' first followers related to this from their own experience. They witnessed the uncertainty of the crowds; they knew other followers who began with enthusiasm and then lost confidence; they faced the hostility of their religious leaders, as well as their own inability to get Jesus' point. Following Jesus was not a sure thing, an obvious solution nor a clear path leading to a happy ending. Following Jesus was fraught with taking chances and running into the darkness of their own reluctance.

When I read the Gospels I look for the point of view and perspective that informs the story. And then I look for a clue as to how that perspective comes into my life. In this story Jesus simply says, "Listen, you who have ears to hear." This kind of listening, the willingness to let the seed grow in the soil of our spirit begins with cracking open the shell: "A seed must fall to the ground and die... (John 12:24).

Hearing, Seeing, Walking are metaphors that Jesus uses to describe what happens when the word to take root in our lives. Notice how we're mixing metaphors. Jesus is not concerned about a logical explanation of the spiritual path. Instead he throws metaphors, stories, parables and paradoxical situations our way so that we must deal with them. To use yet another metaphor, it's like eating pistachios. We have to crack open the shell to enjoy the sweet nut.

Seeing is blindness healed into awareness. Hearing is deafness transformed into non-judgmental and unconditionally loving presence. Walking happens when our crippled legs are strong enough to carry the weight of our whole self. All of these metaphors share a gift of healing and the process of letting go of our self (shell) to enjoy the gift of our true and divinely resourceful self – our spiritual aliveness.

What we need to bring to this process is an alert, relaxed and receptive attitude. This will allow our shell to crack open. Take a few deep breaths and breath into the storyb – and then pay attention to whatever comes into your awareness.

The shell is created by questions like these: Is this what really happened? How is this going to save me? What's the right thing to do? What dogma is Jesus talking about? How can I do the right thing and be the good person? What do I need to believe so that my religion is the true religion?

These are questions that make us the center of our universe. They cement our position in righteousness instead of faith and trust. They constrict our point of view, make it rigid and black and white, whereas Jesus is trying to open our heart to the complexity and vastness of life in God's unconditional love.

The sweet nut is made up of the willingness to be silent as alert to possibilities. It allows us to be comfortable in our ignorance and recognize that there is more here than we might be willing to accept. We need to accept our point of view for its limitations and let the tightness of our mental grip slowly be relaxed so that we can receive with open hands. And in this difficult moment we need to accept our fear, anger, shame and reluctance to let these go. In discovering this hardness in our self we will be left with prayer as our only possibility. And in this moment of frustration

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we may give up and find within this the grace of having room in our heart for Jesus' world - our homecoming in the Kingdom of God.

This is gradual process that finds rich soil in attention and persistence on our part. It's not very practical and we are nothing but practical people. I've found two ways to crack open the shell that have helped me along the way. At the least they give me something practical to do while I'm waiting for the grace of inspiration to take root within me.

The first way of cracking the shell involves making associations. Pay attention to the words and phrases, images and statements that stand out for you. And then write down as many associations as you can for them. As we listen to the stories of Jesus we will constantly find new surprises. Jesus' stories interact with all of his other stories, with our developing life story, and with the stories of others who share their story with us. All of these shed new light on the stories of Jesus.

I often pay attention to other things that I'm reading and then ask, how does this fit into the story that Jesus' is telling? Sometimes a lyric from a piece of music will wake up a fresh perspective within me. Even totally unrelated conversations put the story in a different context and help crack open its meaning.