

St Pius-St Anthony Christ the King Feast Year A

It's me! Do you recognize me? Today's gospel shouts 'recognition' at me. Recognizing sheep from goats is what opens the door to heaven. Sheep in and goats out. How do you tell the difference? Jesus is going to break it down pretty simply for us, but for a moment let's ask: Are there things difficult to tell apart? How can you tell the difference between alligator and crocodile, toad and frog, shrimp and a prawn or green onion and a leek? When I was a kid I struggled with telling the difference between lettuce and cabbage-(which probably tells you I didn't eat much of either). I'd say, "Oh mom, please don't ask me to go get a head of lettuce?" Telling the difference between some things are a matter of life and death: How about the difference between a king snake and a coral snake? Here's a lifesaving rhyme: *'Red touches black, it's a friend jack, red touches yellow it will kill you fellow'*. Or how about spiders, is it just a black spider or a black widow? The first live one I found, I remember being shocked because the red hourglass was under it-on its belly not on its back as I thought, so I was tempted to discount the danger, saying it is a decoy not real? But I did not play around to find out. Same with brown recluse; do you look real close, is that a true violin-fiddle shape or not? My nephew says, "All spiders are bad news", while his dad my brother says, "Don't worry about the big hairy spiders—they eat the poisonous smooth slick ones! Watch for those!" For Jesus' parable today, we don't want to get too lost in the animal world, but what about difference between sheep and goats? I am told that there are differences between natural sheep and goats if you are them out in a field together: Sheep are meeker animals, tails longer & point downward, they graze more steadily and flock together better (group minded). But goats are bolder, tails nubby and point upward, they forage curiously & unpredictably, being more independent and all alpha! Goats may seem cute like sheep, until they butt you.

However, Jesus breaks it down simply enough for us today. The difference between the sheep that make it into the kingdom and the goats that do not, are determined by how they themselves recognized, loved, served and knew Christ in others. The sheep think with and feel with others, while the goats only think and feel for themselves. The goats lock themselves out of the kingdom. Jesus tells us today we will be recognized or not, based on what we have done; done to him, done in his name, done in imitation of him or done because of him, whether we knew we were doing it to him or not. We have this judgment scene today of a great separation (sorting out) of sheep and goats. As if we might hear: "Sheep, come on in to the heavenly fold, but goats, you all stay outside the gate-no green pastures or still waters for you!" But why the different treatment? Because gaining admission to the kingdom depends on how we treated others, how we recognized the presence of Christ in His people or not, and whether we acted on and beheld the divine dignity within other human beings, and treating them

accordingly. ***We will be recognized and welcomed*** into heaven, it sounds, based on how we ***recognized Christ and welcomed seeing Him*** in other people. How did we treat 'them', when 'them' is everybody? Did I know, love and serve Christ in His members, who again are everyone here on earth'. If I have, then I will also be readily recognized at the gate-door, and welcomed in to the kingdom to be known, loved and served by Christ.

Jesus breaks it down simply enough: "Whatever you do (or don't do) to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did or didn't do for me!" (Matt 25:40, 45).

So it is all about recognition: Seeing Christ in the other. We can't act surprised here at the end, because this is not new teaching from Christ. Jesus began this lesson back in Sermon on Mount. In Matt 5:7, Jesus taught "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." And who knows mercy but someone with a heart big enough to place him/herself in another's shoes, and feel with them. I have to ask myself every time before I say something or do something, "Now if he said this to me, or if he did this to me, what would I feel like? How would I react on the receiving end of this?" If I wouldn't like it said or done to me, then I have no business dumping it off on to others. Jesus repeats it in His Golden Rule, in Matt 22:37, 39 "Love God with your all...., and love your neighbor as yourself." Only do to a neighbor, what you would do to yourself. So in this judgement scene, it is like we have a replay of our own actions (Our life is run before our eyes). Our acts judge us and make us our own gatekeeper. Heaven turns out to be like our own heart: We can get in there, if we have been letting other people get in here. Have I been feeling with/for other people, and taking care of them just as I would my own self? If so, come on in-door-like my heart is already open; but if not, then turn around-I've already closed that door on myself (knocking on the wrong door). You can't open this door to heaven, because you have no practice opening your own door to someone before now. So the judgement scene is a recognition scene: 'Show me your ID' Jesus says, or better yet He says, 'Show me My ID - Show me how you have been showing me to others all along. How have you reflected me to others?' If you have been, I recognize you, but if you haven't been, then I don't see Christ in you. Or if You don't see Christ in them, then you won't see Christ now. This door is not opening to you now because you have not been opening it to others before now.

Jesus' whole point is to say that we will be recognized or not, by how we feed, give drink, shelter, welcome and visit one another. All of these actions come about because we care, and we see a deeper connection to the other person, because 'hey, you are me in Christ'; Christ in me Christ in you, I see you- I see me in you. So the door to heaven will be opened to me to the degree that I open the door of my heart to you. What I do to you I do to Christ, and he opens the door to me as I open the door to you!