

Today's gospel, the final teaching of Jesus before he dies, causes two dilemmas.

One: The teaching describes the judgement of the nations. The question raised is: Do we belong to a sheep nation or a goat nation? This question is so fraught with partisan implications that it is left to you to sort out. But if we belong to a goat nation, we are all in trouble.

The second dilemma is: if we look at this teaching as being about individuals as is traditionally done, then knowing that we are doing good undoes the good. Doing good to be good is not good. What a moral trap!

How can we resolve this dilemma?

For a year, we have been reflecting on the Gospel of Matthew. We must gather up everything that we have reflected on to understand what Jesus is getting at. Magi, baptism and temptation, beatitudes, law and love, even of enemies, prayer, money and storms, callings, forgiveness and compassion, parables of wheat, weeds and yeast, lost sheep, workers and vineyards, loaves and fish, love of God, neighbor and self, mercy, reconciliation and Spirit, passion, death and resurrection.

By celebrating and living with this gospel, what kind of person have we become? The more we cultivate a relationship with God, the more we care for our neighbor, the more we are open to the influence of the Holy Spirit.

As a mentor, Jesus forms us to be people driven by the spiritual, by our communion with God. If we act only from the rational or the emotional, we will end up lost.

Jesus forms us into people of the Spirit. When we are living in the flow of the Spirit of God, we don't wait to do the good. Waiting always allows time for a million excuses. We just do it.

When we are living in the flow of the Spirit of God, we don't calculate the cost. There is no quid pro quo expected. When we are living in the flow of the Spirit of God we do not draw attention to ourselves, looking for applause.

We are just riding the flow of God's grace into the world and that flow carries us into heaven. Where, as C. S. Lewis penned: We are surprised by who is there, who is not there, and that we are there.

We close this year of the Gospel of Matthew with this final quote from Dante: We can only be prepared for heaven, by exposing ourselves to the fire of God's love. A tolerance that is developed by exposing ourselves to Christ, in others.