

Epiphany V

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[0 : 00] First, gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn. Words of this morning's holy gospel and name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen. Most Christians do not like to think or talk about God's judgment. At least not the judgment I, the judgment that each of us will one day face.

The exception to this is some of the old-style evangelical churches where God's judgment is used in almost every sermon to scare people to Christ.

I don't think we need to go there, but in good conscience, as those who believe the Scriptures, we can't avoid thinking about judgment completely.

In both the Old Testament and in the New Testament, God speaks to and warns of the day of judgment to come. Sometimes He does so directly.

[1 : 02] Other times He does so more indirectly. Today's gospel lesson is one of those indirect teachings. While this parable is in the midst of a series Jesus uses to teach about the kingdom of God, it includes an indirect teaching on judgment.

Throughout history, including today, God allows the tares, which is both unbelievers and those who are baptized but do not live the faith, to grow up and live in His field, in the world, along with the wheat, those who have and live the faith.

On God's appointed day, on the last day, this will change. He will send His angels into the world to reap. The angels will know who are wheat and who are tares.

The tares will be gathered up first and bundled to be burned in the fires of hell. The wheat will be gathered second and placed in the barn of heaven.

The first question that may come to mind as we learn this is, how do the angels know who are tares and who is wheat? As the parable teaches, they will know by what they see.

[2 : 29] Well, for a time, tares and wheat look alike. At some point, that changes. You and I may not know which is which, but God and the angels do know.

At the harvest, they will see who are tares and who is wheat and will harvest each accordingly. But what criteria will the angels use?

Especially for the baptized, since this is our concern, what distinguishing marks separate wheat from tares? In the epistle, St. Paul states the saving faith of the wheat, those who are the elect of God, holy and beloved, have some very distinct works by which their genuine faith in Christ is made known.

They have hearts filled with compassion for the fallen and for the lost. They are kind to those who are kind to them and to those who are not.

They are meek and long-suffering towards others. In other words, they put others first. They forbear and forgive one another. Instead of holding on to anger and building up resentment, they forgive as Christ has forgiven them.

[3 : 52] This isn't easy, but it's what wheat does. Above all, they love one another as Christ loves them. Christ-like love is Maundy Thursday love.

As Jesus teaches in St. John chapter 13, verses 14 through 35. This love serves one another. It does the menial, stinky jobs, like washing one another's feet.

It is willing to lay down its life for one's friends and for one's enemies. In St. John chapter 13, verse 35, Jesus says, By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.

By this kind of love we show ourselves to be wheat to ourselves, to fellow Christians, to the world, and to the angels who will reap on that last day.

Scripture teaches there are actually two judgments, or it might be better stated that there are two parts to God's judgment. There is the particular judgment and the last judgment.

[5 : 08] I think Jesus sort of addresses both in this morning's gospel. Since he identifies this event taking place at the end of time, it is the final judgment.

But since the difference between tares and wheat is discernible, the parable can also include the particular judgment each of us faces upon death. The judgment St. Paul describes in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 10, and 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verses 12 through 15.

In the particular judgment, our works of faith are judged by God's fire to be either gold, silver, or precious stones, or wood, hay, and straw.

Our eternal destiny is determined by this measure. If the good works produced by our faith in Christ have shown ourselves to be wheat, then we will be brought into the barn of paradise to await the last judgment and our eternal rest in heaven.

If our faith has not produced the good works of faith, and we have shown ourselves to be a tare, then we will be placed in Sheol to await the last judgment and an eternity in the fires of hell.

[6 : 27] The last judgment is described for us in St. Matthew chapter 25, verses 31 through 46. We may know this judgment as the separation of the sheep, which is the wheat, from the goats, which are the tares.

For the dead, eternal destiny has already been determined by the particular judgment. Yet this second judgment or the second part of the judgment is still necessary. In the last judgment, God will show us all that we have done and the consequences of all the actions of our lives, both good and bad.

We will see how the decisions and actions or non-actions we took in our lives affected others. And although those we had the chance to love and serve affected the people, they had the chance to love and serve in their lives.

We will see the ultimate meaning of our own lives as well as the lives of others. Think of this as a puzzle of trillions and trillions of scattered pieces.

in this judgment, God will bring all those trillions and trillions of pieces together so we can see the whole picture of redemption. We will no longer see through a glass darkly.

[7 : 47] We will see face to face. Brethren, it is not comfortable to think about God's judgment, but we must.

Since we have faith in Christ and are striving to do the good works of faith prepared for us to walk in, we should not live in fear, but we equally must not become slack.

We must not presume. At the beginning of St. Matthew chapter 25, which is the primary chapter that Jesus uses to teach about judgment, he tells the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

The wise virgins remained prepared for the bridegroom to come. They kept their lamps filled with the oil of faithful good works.

The foolish virgins slumbered, and they let their lamps run out of the oil of faithful good works.

When the bridegroom arrived, the wise virgins were able to go out to meet him, and he brought them into the marriage feast.

[8 : 55] But the foolish virgins were not prepared, and were locked outside. Jesus' point in each of his parables about judgment is clear.

Wise virgins, sheep, and wheat remain faithful in good works, and are prepared for the end of time and the judgment to come. They almost welcome it.

They cry, Maranatha, come Lord Jesus. Foolish virgins, goats, and tares do not remain faithful and are not prepared for the judgment.

For many Christians, this often leads to the unreasonable fear of death we see so prevalent today. this is our choice. God has given us and continues to give us the grace we need to have a true and lively faith in Christ, a faith evidenced by good works, like the one St. Paul describes for us in the epistle today.

In other words, we have the grace to be wheat. That grace is renewed each time we receive the Holy Eucharist, and is restored each time we receive absolution and the sacrament of penance.

[10 : 13] Grace is the root, faith is the stalk, and works are the spike, which is the part harvested and used for food. May we choose to use that grace to be wheat.

In the name of the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost. Amen.