

**“THE REDEEMER OF MAN, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history.”**

**John Paul II: Redemptor Hominis; 1**

The opening sentence of ‘Redemptor Hominis,’ the first Letter Saint Pope John Paul II wrote to: ‘The sons and daughters of the Church, and to all men and women of good will at the beginning of his Papal ministry.’

Perhaps, as he wrote those words, he was reflecting on the Gospel we’ve just listened to, the Parable of the sheep and goats; the very last Parable Jesus tells in Matthew’s Gospel.

It’s a grand and sweeping scene in which Jesus is pictured as King and Judge, and it describes the Last Day – the Day of the Lord – when Jesus returns in glory at the end of time.

That defining moment when all the nations are gathered together, and divided into two groups.

That defining moment, cosmically, and personally, when all the human race gathers for the Last Judgement before Jesus, the King of love who judges with mercy and compassion.

Prehistoric men and women, early American Indians, ancient peoples of Africa, Asians, aborigines; people in Palm Springs and Paris; people in Oxford and Ontario; Kings and paupers; rock stars and prisoners.

The entire human race, from the first person to the last, will have to appear before the Risen Jesus. Buddhists and Hindus; Jews and Moslems; New Age devotees; humanists and atheists; all will have to appear before Jesus of Nazareth.

Each one of us, and all people, will have to appear before Jesus of Nazareth because – ultimately – we’re not responsible to ourselves alone for our life, but to Jesus of Nazareth.

His is the last face each person who ever lived will see before they enter eternity.

And the measure by which we’ll be judged is how we’ve treated those brothers and sisters of Jesus who hunger and thirst; those who are sick; those who lack the necessities of life like shelter and clothing; those who are imprisoned, physically or spiritually.

Having said that, today’s Parable isn’t about philanthropy, but about judgement; separating the unreal from the real things.

The sign that we’re truly renewed by Jesus, that our love for Him is genuine, that our prayer is God-centred, not self-centred, that the Holy Spirit dwells in all His fullness deep within our hearts, is not what we say, but what we do.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, [Jesus says] but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” Mt. 7: 21

A sign that the Lord has put: “A new heart and put a new spirit in [us].” Ezek. 36: 26 “A change of heart produced by the Spirit.” Rm. 2: 29

Then, when we do those seemingly ordinary things of helping someone in need, we recognise in their features those of Jesus.

“I tell you the truth, [Jesus says] when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!” Mt. 25: 40

To some of you, possibly many of you, this Parable is frightening because you’re afraid of God; thinking of God as a stern, unyielding judge.

Quite the opposite is true, in fact, because He says to us: “Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow.” Is. 1: 18

How many of us, though, would deserve to be condemned! And it would even be just. Yet He forgives!

Here, we come face to face with the mystery of Jesus’ mercy.

**Mercy is something which is difficult to understand: it doesn't eliminate sin, for it's God's forgiveness that does this.**

**Mercy is the manner in which God forgives.**

**I think the Lord's mercy is like the sun: we look at the sky, the many stars, but when the morning sun comes, we don't see the stars, only the sun – such is the mercy of God**

**It's a great light of love, of tenderness; for Jesus doesn't forgive with a decree. He forgives with a caress.**

**He forgives by caressing the wounds caused by our sins, because He's involved in forgiveness, is involved in our salvation.**

**God's mercy is great: forgiving us by caressing us.**

**So, at the end of our earthly life, when we see Jesus face to face, may we not cower in fear but run to Him to be caressed by His mercy for eternity.**

**And, in this life, too, to know that His "Goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, [so that] I will live in the house of the Lord forever." Ps. 23: 6**