

Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Matthew 25:31-46

³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ ⁴¹Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

SERMONIC INTERROGATION: How do we become so blind as to not be conscious of serving Christ?

Kissing Frogs

1. Starting in childhood, we love stories that involve **secret identities**. Think of the frog that turns into the handsome prince. What princess would even consider the possibility? I suppose if a frog *told* you that he was really a handsome prince you might believe him; I mean the frog is *talking* to you after all, so there is something unusual about him to begin with. I wonder how many princesses would go around kissing every frog they meet without any notion that a prince may be hidden beneath that slimy green exterior.
2. Boys aren't into frog princes, but we *are* into **superheroes**, and what superhero does not have a secret identity (secret to everyone except the audience, that is)? Superman spends a lot of his time posing as Clark Kent (that's his daytime job). Peter Parker transforms into Spiderman. Poor Peter Parker and Clark Kent are nerds who are in love with women who hardly give them the time of day, but Lois Lane

and Mary Jane Watson *obsess* over Superman and Spiderman. Part of the fun in watching these adventures is to *know* what Lois and Mary Jane *don't* know, that the nerd is actually the hero.

3. Now there is some of that “secret identity” intrigue going on in **today's gospel text**, is there not? Jesus starts at the end of the story – “the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory” – mind you that this is Jesus speaking just prior to his arrest and trial and crucifixion; he's hardly looking very glorious to his audience – and Jesus says that everyone will be gathered around his feet, and he separates the good from the bad before he reveals his secret identity, which happens to be “the least of these,” the ugly frog that you would never consider kissing, the nerd that you are trying to avoid. And if you happen to be the goat that refused to kiss the frog (sorry for mixing my metaphors), you're shocked, and you say to Jesus the Superhero, “I had no idea you and these low life were one and the same.” “If I had known...”
4. Jesus and Jerry Siegel and Stan Lee and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm all understood a **tragic element of our human nature**: we are self-serving. Princesses don't go around kissing frogs because they don't see princes inside frogs. Lois Lane and Mary Jane Watson don't pay much attention to Clark Kent or Peter Parker because they see nothing super in those men. And people don't pay enough attention to “the least of these” because we don't see anything divine in them. We have no problem serving KING JESUS, the one who sits on the judgment seat with his scepter and heavenly host, but if he comes to us as a frog or a mild-mannered reporter for the Daily Planet, or a leper or a homeless woman, we avert our eyes, we change the channel, we find a more pleasant distraction. If we actually saw Jesus, Christ the King, in the in the lowly, the poor, the hungry, the sick, wouldn't we use all our strength and resources to address his needs? We need to be honest with ourselves; most of us would not. Jesus informs us of his secret identity in the poor and the lowly, and he tells us in today's gospel lesson how things will play out in the end, and even with our reverence for Jesus and reverence for scripture, even when we know the end of the story, we, the Christian community, do not offer more resources to care for the lowly ones, and by extension, we show that we are not really that motivated to serve Jesus. We show that we are ultimately self-serving.
5. Self-centered Christian can perform a lot of **mental gymnastics** to excuse their indifference to the suffering of the lowly. Some may even use **God's grace** as a convenient excuse for their self-centeredness; rather than prompting them to respond in *love* to God's grace given to us so freely in Christ, they fall back upon grace as their “way out” of the judgment we deserve. “*I know I haven't loved the least of these, which by extension means I haven't loved you, Lord Jesus, but I confess my faith and am covered by your grace, RIGHT, Jesus? Buddy?*” Perhaps they are covered by grace, but aren't they still acting out of self-interest, and I really don't know if that's going to fly when they stand before Christ our King. Does our profession of faith excuse us from judgment? Perhaps a better question is this: how much faith do we actually have in Jesus if we don't bother to obey him? In the Gospel lesson, there are a lot of goats who call Jesus LORD, but in the end Jesus say to them, “**Depart from me.**” They don't really know Jesus, and Jesus doesn't know them.
6. Now here's the thing: You might think that it's enough to go out, starting now, and start ministering to the lowly, to the poor and sick and hungry, and that would be a good thing, if we all did. But that is only the beginning of a long process. You see, strangely enough, even the good *sheep* who tend to the needs of others fail to recognize Jesus in the faces of those they serve. They ask him the same question that the bad goats ask him: “Lord, when did we see *you* sick or hungry or thirsty...?” In other words, **they don't see Jesus** in the ones they serve. If you serve the least of these *knowing* that they are none other than Jesus, you're not going to be surprised when Jesus welcomes you; you'll be saying, “Yep. I knew it was you all along, Jesus. That's why I did it.” And I think Jesus would ask them, “Was it because

you thought these people were me that you cared for them? You didn't care for them because of who *they* were? You didn't love them for being themselves; you loved them because you wanted to love me." That is the conundrum of this story; you cannot love Jesus without loving others. It's not an either-or situation. We are called to love others, and by extension serve "even the least of these," and if we truly love others we won't be conscious of Jesus being in "the least of these." We will love people for who they are. We'll be the princess kissing frogs *not* because we expect them to turn into handsome princes; we'll be kissing them because they're frogs, *and we just love frogs*.

7. **This is the transformation** that Christ wants us to experience; from serving others out of some sense of obligation to serving them simply because they need to be served. It doesn't matter to you who they are; you just see a need and respond to it. You're not trying to set yourself up to look good when King Jesus comes riding in on a cloud, but rather you are transformed by the Holy Spirit into Christ's own likeness. And we can't simply wish this transformation into being. It takes time. So *yes*, go and serve the lowly, offering them food and shelter and medicine and clothing, because in so doing you will actually get to know them, and when you get to know them, you will start to really care for them, and when start to care for them for who they are, you may come to love them for who they are, and the Lord will smile upon you. Because now you will be like Jesus, loving others not because Jesus may be hiding inside the mild-mannered homeless man in front of you but because you care for the person. You'll be kissing frogs not because you expect them to change into handsome princes. You'll be kissing them simply because you love frogs. Let us pray.