

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Lord provides. He is the Gracious Giver of all good things. He opens His hand, and satisfies the desires of every living thing. So You were hungry, and He gave you food. You were perishing of spiritual thirst, dead in your transgressions. But He gave you Living Water. So you were thirsty and He gave you drink. Alienated from God by your transgressions, you were a stranger to God. But God, in His mercy, took you in.

You were naked in your fallenness, standing with your first father ashamed before God. But nothing you could do is covering sufficient. So He clothed you. He vested you with His Righteousness. You were sick of soul, and He visited you. He healed you. You were in the prison of transgression and trespass, and He came to you. He made you free.

His sheep hear His voice. His sheep follow Him. The grace they have received from their Shepherd they extend to others. So it is with you. Responding to God's boundless love and unconditional grace, you show mercy to others. But of that mercy you keep no tally. Eleemosynary works, works of mercy, works of kindness, are the fruit of faith, the fruit of the Spirit of God that fills you.

Faith cannot be seen. But the works of faith testify to the presence of the Holy Spirit. By that Spirit you hear the Word of God. So His sheep hear His voice, and they follow Him. And no one can snatch them out of His pierced hand, for He has purchased and won you. He has made you sheep of His fold.

On the great Day of Atonement, the greatest Feast of the Old Testament, the sins of the people were placed upon the goat, and the goat was driven out, sent back to the author of sin. And so it will be on the Last Day. Although now the flock is mixed, although now goats sneak into the flock, when the Lord comes in judgment, when the Lord comes in His glory, on that Day when you stand before the Ancient of Days, when the court is seated and the books are opened, when you are judged by the Son of Man, He will separate the sheep from the goats.

He knows His own, and is known by them. The sheep He will place at His right, the favored side. But not so the goats. They are not sheep. They rejected His voice. They hearkened rather to the voice the Prophet calls "the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking", which are the devil's lies, the doctrines and teachings of this fallen world. The word to which you hearken shapes your heart. And from your heart flow your works.

Faith cannot be seen. But the works one does bear witness to the faith he holds. Unbelief may do works that outwardly seem good. But the motivation for those works is not good. The problem is not the works, but the heart, and the word that shaped it. So on the Last Day faith has kept no record of works, but unbelief is bold to challenge the Judge. The goats demand a reckoning from Him. But God sees the heart.

So the goats, those who rejected Christ in this lifetime, will be driven out. They will be sent back to the author of sin as was their precursor, the scapegoat. But unlike the scapegoat, the sins for which they are driven out are their own. Their sins separate them from God now. Their sins

separate them from the true Flock now, although for a time they remained mixed in. But those sins separate them from God and the Church Victorious for eternity.

It is a horrible judgment. We wish that on no man. God desires all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the Truth. He gave His Only Son over to death for the sins of all men. So for those who reject Him, the separation of the flock and the condemnation of the goats is a just judgment.

For those who will not believe in the Triune God, those who will not believe in God Incarnate, Jesus Christ, those who will not believe in the atoning death of the God Man, the only Savior, those who will not believe in His great victory over death, those who will not believe in this lifetime will spend eternity in torment. For unbelief is selfish. Unbelief covets and hoards. And inasmuch as they did not do it to one of the least of these – the sheep – they did not do it to Him.

So the Apostle writes “...it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels...” So the sheep, you, dear Christian, you who are troubled and persecuted and tossed to and fro in this world, you will know the blessed rest God has promised.

But upon those who reject God, upon those who trouble His sheep, He will “...in flaming fire take vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction.” But on that day, you, O Baptized of Christ, you given faith in Him, you who are declared righteous in His Blood, you will be glorified among His saints, because you have believed the Apostolic Testimony.

When the Lord comes in His glory, when the Lord places you on His right, He will articulate the works of faith. But faith keeps no lists. You will answer with all the sheep “Lord, when did we...?” Because faith is always aware your shortcomings. Faith is humble. Faith takes no credit. Faith gives all glory and honor to God.

Indeed it is God Himself that prepares good works beforehand that, by the Spirit’s power, you should walk in them. So as the Apostle writes, “your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other...” And in the miraculous Great Exchange, in His great love, God imputes to you the righteousness of Christ. His works are made your works.

Your Shepherd pastures you in this life. So you are hungry, and Christ your King gives you His Body to eat. You are thirsty, and the Blood shed for you He makes your drink. In Holy Communion, the God who took you in enters you. He covers your nakedness with the gleaming vestment of His righteousness, vesting you in the wedding garment, prepared for His unending Feast. By Paten and Chalice He heals you. In the Holy Eucharist He visits you. By the forgiveness of your sins He frees you.

And soon the same Christ will say to you “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” And you, dear Christian, will go into eternal life.

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