

## The Judgement of the Nations (Matthew 25:31-46)

‘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. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then 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; for 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, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then 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? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And 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.” Then 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; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I 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.” Then 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?” Then 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.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’ (New Revised Standard Version)

*Draft for short reflection of Church President Dr. Volker Jung:*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

the story of the Last Judgment, as it is told in the Gospel of Matthew, is well known and has led to a great history of interpretation. We know it probably all from different contexts. I would like to reflect on it briefly and ask what it can mean in the light of our meeting here in Frankfurt.

Jesus tells this story in order to explain something about God’s will: At the end of the world, people are divided into those who have lived according to God and those who have failed. Here, the focus is on those who are marginalized, with no voice: the naked, poor and sick, prisoners, refugees, foreigners, and foreign-made. “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.” It’s that simple! Spontaneous charity, pragmatic and without any hidden agenda. No one knows at first glance why he or she has lived according to this divine will of God and thereby did or did not do what is necessary to do in order to earn the Kingdom of Heaven. Those that can be touched by the plight of others seem to have understood the Christian message and encounter Jesus in helping the “least of these who are members of my family”. Quite naturally, almost as too casually they are surprised by the judgement and its reasoning: Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked?

Actually it is a nice story. But there's a catch: The "least of these who are members of my family" remain least. They are hopefully helped, but on the image level of this story, they remain trapped in their life conditions. It seems hard to find any sustainable change in their situation. No freedom, no health, no secure residence status. They merely serve to illustrate the divine will.

How different sound the words from Ephesians chapter 2: " So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone." A far-reaching theological reinterpretation. A new paradigm is on its way!

You are members of the household of God! Of course, this commitment aims primarily for Christian believers who rely on the cornerstone Jesus Christ. Because he keeps the whole "project" together. However, I wonder what would actually happen, if this promise would not only focus on the pious, the already convinced followers of Christ but also the entire community, even the whole society? Such an understanding would open up the action of the churches becoming some kind of a mission.

In my eyes, such an interpretation is not too far away from the gospel. Because then all the people and citizens of the household would be equal members who have the right to take part in the life of the community. It would mean equal access, not only to "the Father" as it told in the letter to the Ephesians. No, it is also about equal access to the social achievements of a society. The distinction between locals and foreigners would be eradicated. Everybody would be just a part of it: those "who were far off" and those, "who were near."

I would call this an "egalitarian approach" that can be found also in other parts of the Bible. St. Paul in Galatians even goes so far as to claim that there is now "no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

It is quite clear to St. Paul: the reality of God changes *our* reality. Social distinctions can no longer divide human beings. Among brothers and sisters the other categories of origin, culture or language do not have the final say. In other words: The drawers in which we and others like to sort again and again, they no longer fit, considering the embracing grace of God. Their cupboards have become too small for what we call humanity and dignity.

God wants all people to live together in justice and peace. Yes, in the end it's not just an Christian-only desire for harmony. The promise of a free and egalitarian society is to all people who are equally equipped with an inalienable dignity.

And this is how I understand the mission of CCME: the Churches' commission for migrants in Europe is committed to an „inclusive policy for refugees, migrants and ethnic minorities“ at the European level. Whoever gets engaged in such goals, takes part in the mission of the churches to put humanity of people first at the very center. And thus the „least of these who are members of my family" are finally relieved of their role in salvation history, freed to exercise their equal access to social participation.

Inclusive, participatory, and committed to human dignity – this is how CCME worked over the past 50 years, and will be hopefully continue to work- at least as long as it is needed. To this may God give blessings. Because this work is - still - sorely needed.

Amen.