



SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19TH, 2017

MARGARET, QUEEN OF SCOTLAND,
HELPER OF THE POOR, 1093

WISDOM 7:21-8:1;

PSALM 146

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17;

MATTHEW 25:31-40

1ST READING

A Reading from the Book of Wisdom

I learned both what is secret and what is manifest, for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me. There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle. For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom. She is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail. She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well.

Wisdom 7:21—8:1

PSALM 146

- 1 Hallelujah! Praise the Lord, O my soul! * I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.
- 2 Put not your trust in rulers, nor in any child of earth, * for there is no help in them.
- 3 When they breathe their last, they return to earth, * and in that day their thoughts perish.
- 4 Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help! * whose hope is in the Lord their God;
- 5 Who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them; * who keeps his promise for ever;
- 6 Who gives justice to those who are oppressed, * and food to those who hunger.
- 7 The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind; * the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
- 8 The Lord loves the righteous; the Lord cares for the stranger; * he sustains the orphan and widow, but frustrates the way of the wicked.
- 9 The Lord shall reign for ever, * your God, O Zion, throughout all generations.
Hallelujah!

God our creator and redeemer, inspire your people, in prosperity or adversity, to turn always to you, eternal source of life, health, and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

2ND READING

A Reading from Paul's Letter to the Colossians

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:12-17

GOSPEL READING

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ According to Matthew

'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."

Matthew 25:31-40

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

I have decided to depart from the *Common Lectionary* to focus on one of saints whose life is celebrated in the Anglican Lectionary book entitled; *For All The Saints*. The life I have chosen on which to concentrate is that of Margaret of Scotland.

Margaret's life, I believe has much to help us in looking at our current society and the difficult issues that seem to bubble up around us on a daily basis. She lived her earthly life a little less than a thousand years ago. She was the consort queen to Malcolm III. And yes, she was wealthy!

Each year millions of folk invest some of their hard-earned income on lottery tickets. Why? — to become wealthy! Each year there are those who in fact do become wealthy. And to some, when what seems enough to make them wealthy is won, they find that that new addition to their cash-flow doesn't go as far as they had hoped. Sadly, some end up in a worse financial situation than they had before winning the lottery.

Now Margaret was in the opposite situation. She was already rich — she was a royal! Having already been rich, what would one expect Margaret would do with her cash? I am sure her dresses were first rate; and her furniture all matched; and the paintings on the walls were exquisite. Her dinners were likely well prepared as well. Did I mention that she also had 8 children? She may have even fit into that category of person that is so hard to buy a present for because they already have everything they need.

So what did Margaret do with her time and money? In spite of her wealth, her possessions, her royal responsibilities and her precious children, she decided that her life could have more meaning. Through her husband, she initiated helpful reforms in the royal court, the church, and the nation.

But still, there were other needs that demanded attention. She would on occasion leave the castle gates behind and seek out the poor and other people on the fringes of society. This was more than an academic exercise for her. For Margaret was not satisfied in simply being an observer. She allowed herself to become involved! Not only did she give out large sums of money to help the poor; she worked to making sure that the institutions of the day, whose job it was to alleviate the problems of the poor, were in fact having the desired effect on the homeless, the hungry and the orphaned. But some people may say, *She was rich and powerful, so how can what she did a millennium ago apply to today's society, with its declining middle class?*

Enter today's Gospel story. The story is a familiar one. Jesus divides the nations into two groups — the good guys and the not so good guys. He refers them as 'sheep' and 'goats'.

The good guys, the sheep, are like Margaret — responsive in good and helpful ways to any number of troubling conditions experienced by their neighbours. The villains, the goats symbolically, are the opposite of Margaret as they show no indication of caring about what happens to the rest of humanity. They show no regard for the fact that what we do, or do not do, affects other people at a very personal level!

Jesus is not happy with leaving it at that. He goes on to say that the way we treat other human beings is the actually the way we are in effect, treating him! So involved and great is the identification of Jesus with people that what hurts any person is also felt as an affliction by Jesus. Such affliction is taken as personal. Now Jesus' view is not designed to set up the stage for more guilt for all of us to deal with. Instead, it is to provide us a launching point for the rest of our lives.

What is often overlooked by just about everyone is that Jesus talks about the sheep and the goats as being 'nations'. What he says applies to the individuals of any nation, but the aggregate also becomes a major focus of concern. Even as the questioning seems to get more personal, the word 'we' is used rather than 'I'.

I once gave a sermon in London entitled 'Lazarus lives in London'. The Biblical impoverished Lazarus came to the gates of a very rich man every evening in hopes of getting some food. The rich man never helped Lazarus. Finally the rich guy died and did not go to heaven. But impoverished Lazarus did go to paradise when he died.

A woman came to me afterward and said that she agreed that we should try to help those in need when ever possible. The question is *how*? What was missing in my sermon was the solution to the problem. This woman pointed out that it could be dangerous for individual people to just start taking in folk that they do not know.

Part of the answer to her concern is found in Jesus' use of the word, nation. Nations take on personalities just like individual people do and when they want to, they can do things that a single person cannot. Look around the world and think about the differences among the assortment of nations. This is true in any number of ways from militarism, to human rights, to financial stability, to societal trends, to political climates, to the arts — the list keeps growing.

In the eyes of God, nations are also accountable in how they treat people. How often do we hear around the world of national efforts to ignore troubled people? How often do we hear of the people who are resented in some nations because they have no job. They can be seen to be a drag on society with no perceived interest in working.

How often do we also hear of nations that develop policies that do acknowledge the poor among them and the need to see to their basic needs? And how often do we see efforts to learn from these good nations that Jesus would call sheep?

As part of the ruling family, Margaret may have been rich. She paid from her abundance. So it is that many a nation can do a better job of looking after those who find it difficult to look after themselves — these nations can also help out of their abundance. And yes, abundance is there more frequently than often presumed. I am yet to hear of a war that can't be fought due to a lack of funds? Nor have I seen many nations who look after their poorer citizens to be in bad financial shape.

There is an old saying among elected officials that goes something like this: *By our followers, we are led*. If the mood of the electors goes in a particular direction, the political authorities often find it difficult to ignore. So each of us are part of the problem or part of the solution.

And who knows Margaret may have been on to something really great, that should have been obvious. It just may be that we could find out that a better economy is one in which the poor are no longer poor. Put another way —> Not responding to poverty actually may be found to be bad for business!