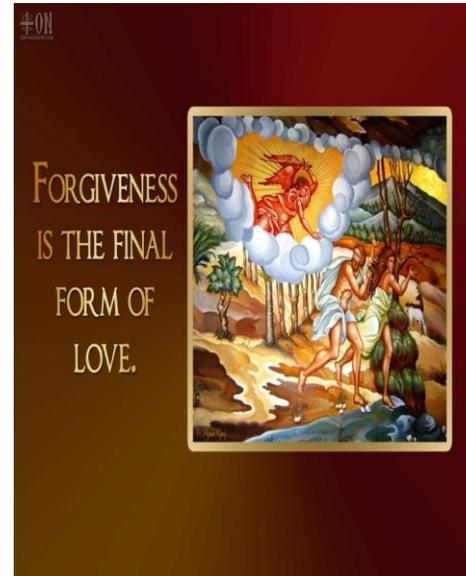


FATHER ANTON'S WORDS OF WISDOM:

The readings this Sunday are not the most pleasant, but they are a necessary part of our spiritual journey. We must remember that there is a lot of metaphor in the Gospels, and that each Gospel writer was reaching out to different cultural



communities with differing ideals about Christ and Christianity in general. In today's message Jesus again uses a story to teach, and he uses language that is not to be taken literal, but rather figuratively. He uses Goats and Sheep to represent the just and the unjust, and he speaks of how the entire human race is connected. He makes clear that we are not an island unto ourselves;

each action and each word affects the universe as a whole. "Whenever you did this for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me" and "Whenever you neglected to do this for the least of my brothers and sisters, you neglected to do it for me." Here we are reassured that we share the Divine Life now, not yet fully; but in you and I is the "Christ." The use of goats and sheep is quite appropriate, because each conducts itself much the same as we do. The person that cares for goats is a "herder", because the goats like to lead and often times in doing so trample on the others. Goats are pretty stubborn and can be a bit vicious. Sound familiar? Sheep on the other hand are docile and gentle. They are "Shepherded" rather than "herded." They need a leader otherwise

they become easily lost, and they become easy prey. You and I are called to be “Sheep” to recognize in ourselves the need to be cared for. We all want to think that we are independent, and to a certain degree we are; we are free to make choices and to follow the path that we think is best for us. But at times we come to realize that the choice made wasn’t a good one, and that the path that we thought was going somewhere led nowhere. Here is where we call on our “Good Shepherd” to bring us back into the fold. Did you know that the priest’s stole is symbolic of the Shepherd’s Staff? It is a reminder to us priests that our mission is to those who are lost and searching, and to go after them and bring them back into the fold. Not by scolding or fear tactics, but through love and gentleness. All of us can easily relate to the goats referred to today, too. How often have we pushed forward in stubbornness and because of pride? How often have we trampled ourselves and others in many of the situations we have faced? I like to think that the goats are “those who are always in a hurry and get nowhere,” and the sheep are “those who understand: ‘slow and easy wins the race.’” Yes there will come a time in your life and mine when we will have to reconcile ourselves to the choices we made and we will have to deal with the consequences. Heaven put simply is a spiritual state after death in which we are able to be embraced for all eternity by the love of God as a result of the earthly choices we have made. Hell is simply the opposite; it is a spiritual state, in which we will be aware of God’s love, but because of the choices we have made; we will never be capable of being able to experience God’s love. Make no mistake, it is not God who judges, but we determine our eternity by the choices we make while we are still “earthly.” The awesomeness of life with Jesus is that we know that as our Good Shepherd he will always welcome us back into the fold, but as it is in all life situations, it is up to us to make that first move. We need always to remind ourselves that we are not alone. We live in God’s world, God lives in us, and together we journey to eternity.

Let us pray: *Loving Jesus, the prospect of judgment in today’s gospel isn’t a very pleasant one, yet I am encouraged in knowing that you are my “Good Shepherd.” Give me the courage not to act as the goats in your teaching, but rather may I have the gentleness of a lamb. May the eyes of my soul enlighten me so that I may see your face in everyone: the good, the bad, the addict, the alcoholic and all who need to experience your presence in their lives. Use me as your instrument that I may fulfill the words of today’s Gospel “Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters that you do unto me.” Amen.*