

St. Phoebe's Day Reflection

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Wednesday, September 3, 2025

Matthew 25: 35-41

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who 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 drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.'

Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?

When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?

When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'

And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me.'

This may seem like an unlikely passage to hear tonight, as we consider the feminine voices and images in Scripture. But the call to “welcome the stranger,” “clothe the naked,” feed the hungry,” “visit the ill” have traditionally been the work of women. It seems to be a very feminine voice as heard through Jesus. How did Jesus come to preach this parable? Here's one scenario:

Imagine Jesus as a little boy living in Nazareth with his mother, Mary, and father, Joseph. Just as my two boys asked me many times, imagine that Jesus asked his mother about his birth story. “Mom, tell me a story. Where was I born? Tell me about our life when I was little?” And with a sigh, she told him that they had to flee their homeland to escape horrifying harm, to find shelter, food, clothing. And she told him about the people who welcomed them. Mary told and retold these early stories of his life. (What child doesn't like the same story to be repeated over and over again?)

Did the stories that Mary tell her beloved Son become the inspiration for this parable? (I imagine she was Jesus' inspiration for many of his parables.) Lessons learned about how others greeted his family and offered shelter, offered food, offered to stand with them on their perilous journey.

This story is ancient. A story repeated over and over again through the centuries. In today's world, migrant women and men are forced to make the same kind of heart wrenching journeys to other countries - to find safe havens from the cruelties of their homeland. Just like Mary and Joseph fleeing from Bethlehem to Egypt as they feared that Herod would kill their beloved child.

And the story still brings anguish today.

How often do we see in the news or on our streets a Mary, Joseph, and baby on their migrant journey? Do we recognize in them the same strength, determination, and risks that it took for the Holy Family to brave the cruelties of the journey? How many are escaping their homeland for fear that they will be killed or imprisoned unjustly? Will today's migrant families meet those who "welcome the stranger" on their journey?

Someday their children may ask them to tell the story of when they were born and how they arrived at this place. And how will our migrant brothers and sisters tell the birth stories to their children? Will the storytelling include snippets about the helpers along the way? Will we be a part of their stories?

"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me."

Mary, Mother, storyteller, pray for us.

May we learn to be a part of the journey for others.

And may their children hear the stories of those who welcomed the stranger.