



## Monday of the 1st Week of Lent

**Date:** Monday, March 10, 2025 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** C

**First Reading:** Leviticus 19:1–2, 11–18

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 19:8–10, 15 | **Response:** John 6:63b

**Gospel Acclamation:** 2 Corinthians 6:2b

**Gospel Reading:** Matthew 25:31–46

**Preached at:** the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House in the Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia.

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**T**here are moments in Scripture that do not simply invite reflection but demand a response. Today's Gospel is one of them. It is not a parable wrapped in metaphor, nor a theological discourse to be dissected—it is the vision of the Last Judgment, where the King himself, radiant in divine glory, speaks the final word on our lives. And what does he ask? Not about our theological knowledge, not about the commandments we avoided breaking, not even about the prayers we have said, but about love. Love made visible, tangible, incarnate in service to those in need.

The First Reading from Leviticus sets the stage. It is a passage of imperatives—do not steal, do not lie, do not oppress, do not exploit the weak. It is the language of justice, spoken to a people forming their identity before God. But this justice is not a cold balance of rights and duties; it is infused with the holiness of God himself: “Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.” This is no abstract ideal. It is a call to a way of life where every action, every decision, reflects something of the divine.

Yet, as strong as these prohibitions are, they are not enough. The absence of sin is not the fullness of virtue. We can live an entire life avoiding evil, yet fail in doing good. This is the heart of Jesus' words in the Gospel. He does not ask whether we avoided sin—he asks whether we embraced love. Whether we fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, welcomed the stranger. The standard of judgment is not the evil we avoided but the love we enacted.

There is something startling about how Jesus phrases this. “Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me.” He does not say, “as if you did it for me.” He does not say, “you will be rewarded as if I were in their place.” He says, you did it to me. Jesus is not merely aligned with the poor—he is the poor. He is the one in the prison cell, the one shivering at night, the one whose stomach aches with hunger. The mystery of the Incarnation does not end with Bethlehem; it extends into the streets and slums of our world.

We cannot spiritualize this away. It is not enough to love humanity in the abstract while ignoring the suffering of the person in front of us. Here in Zambia, we do not need to look far to find the faces of Christ. We see him in the street children who beg for food. We see him in the workers struggling under unfair wages. We see him in the families displaced by economic hardship. And perhaps the most uncomfortable truth of all: we will be judged not on whether we lamented these realities, but whether we acted.

This is not new to the Church’s teaching. The saints have lived this Gospel with radical clarity. Consider St. Katharine Drexel, whose feast we celebrated last week. Born into wealth in 19th-century America, she could have spent her life in comfort. Instead, she saw Christ in the marginalized—Native Americans and African Americans—and gave everything to serve them, building schools, advocating for justice, and even founding a religious order dedicated to their upliftment. She knew what today’s Gospel demands: love must move beyond sentiment to sacrifice.

Lent is a season of purification, but we must ask: purification for what? It is not an endurance test of self-denial. It is a stripping away of all that prevents us from love. Prayer is not an end in itself—it attunes our hearts to hear Christ’s voice. Fasting is not self-discipline for its own sake—it creates space to hunger for what truly matters. Almsgiving is not mere charity—it is justice, the recognition that what we have is not ours alone but meant for the good of all.

So we must ask ourselves:

- When have I walked past Christ unrecognized, unwilling to see him in the suffering around me?
- What attachments keep me from responding with the full generosity of heart that today’s Gospel demands?

- How will I, this week, love not in word or feeling, but in concrete, visible action?

Let us not wait until the Last Judgment to answer.

And let us continue to keep Pope Francis in our prayer.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.