

God's plan for Mary and Joseph includes the journey to Bethlehem that we just heard about in the reading from the Gospel according to Luke. In this story Mary and Joseph are anonymous faces in the crowd. They don't have the wealth or importance to rate a private room at the inn, and these rooms are all occupied anyway. Someone – another anonymous and unremembered person – does them the kindness of offering the privacy of a stable, so that Mary doesn't have to give birth on the crowded floor of the common room, or in an alley. We, the hearers of this story, know Mary and Joseph's names and how important to history they and their child will be, but at this point in their story their fame and recognition lie many years in the future. Even Jesus' birth will cause only a momentary stir before he goes back into obscurity for another thirty years. Joseph will die while still known to only a few, for his Son's hour will not yet have come. Mary's eventual destiny as Queen of Heaven, a name known to everyone, is unimaginably different than the quiet life she will live out in the care of John before her assumption.

We know that all that Mary is to us, and that all we honor and venerate about her, are due to the fact that her son is Jesus – she is the Mother of God. Her glory and fame, as it were, came about by her fiat, her following the will of God. It's this that made her a household name. To see it any other way is to seriously misunderstand the very idea of veneration, even to the point of idolatry. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord" she says in the Magnificat. Other translations have it, "My soul magnifies the greatness of the Lord." All of her glory, every honor including her crown as Queen, are really God's glory shining through her, and she got these honors from following the will of God, starting long before anybody outside her own village had ever heard of her.

We can say the same of Joseph. What little we do know about him comes entirely from the story about his son Jesus, so it's clear that his honor and memory – what recognition he has – are a reflection of the glory of God. Humbly and without a word spoken that was ever recorded, he went about doing the will of God and serving our Lord, and this was his way to a legacy and an honor incomparably greater than any he might otherwise have attained in his life.

Fame and fortune, honor, glory, enduring legacies can be achieved in a lot of different ways. There are a lot of different ways to become a household name. Not all of these ways are good ways, and not everyone famous got that way for good reason. Some people are household names for all the wrong reasons. Who knows, amongst us here tonight? I don't know who here will one day be canonized, or whose funeral will be attended by a thousand people, or who might be a celebrity or a star someday. Some of the saints were wealthy, or powerful, or celebrities in their time – but that's not why they're honored by the Church and in heaven. St. Louis was a king, but not every king is a saint. St. Francis and St. Katherine Drexel began life very wealthy, but they put serving God before their family fortune.

This brings me to what I want to say about our reading from Matthew. Jesus is sorting the sheep from the goats – those whom he rewards to his right and those whom he sends away to his left. *Everyone* in this story is anonymous, and the point of this choice by the author is clear: their judgement is coming down to how they served the Lord, not who they were in life. This

should bring the point into focus for all of us here – at that moment when God looks at you on judgement day and you're waiting to see whether he points right or left, in that instant life's priorities will become absolutely and crystal clear.

Every saint's story - every statue along church walls – testifies to fact that there's a right kind of legacy, whether anyone remembers us or not, and regardless of what else we are known for. The right way is to rank God first in importance, and do his will and be his disciple; then let whatever follows from that, follow. Surely, at the Judgement of the Nations, it is better to be one of the nameless sheep, then to be one of the rich and famous goats. Let us listen to our Lord and take these words of his to heart: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you besides."