

**The Feast Day of Saint Wilfrid of York**  
**The Rev. Charles Sacquety**

**10-15-06**

*Micah 6:6-8*

*Psalm 15:2-7*

*Hebrews 3:1-6*

*Matthew 25:31-40*

Holy God, pray open your word that we may receive it; pray open our hearts that we may understand it, pray open our wills that we may perform it, in the name of Christ our Lord.

My name is Charles Sacquety and it's a great joy to be able to be here with you this morning. I thank the staff and the congregation for inviting me on this the Feast of St. Wilfrid to join with you in this festive celebration.

When I was hungry You fed me; when I was thirsty You gave me drink; when I was naked You clothed me; when I was sick You visited me; when I was in prison You came to me. Now the question is are we the sheep or are we the goats? Or maybe we're a little bit of both sheep and goat. These familiar scriptures that we had today, when I first read them I thought well everybody knows them I don't need to do that, I can do something more daring. I'll talk about the war in Iraq or the conflict in Afghanistan or the nuclear power in North Korea or the human devastation in Darfur. Then I thought, well the Rector Emeritus of All Saints Pasadena was (laughing), so I decided to skip that part and go back to the scriptures of today.

Friday, there was an article in the LA Times about some non-profit organizations who were helping immigrants, some of them probably illegal, apply for food stamps for their children that were born here in the United States. Of course, as I read that all the garbage that surrounds immigration in our land now came to mind. People misusing our social system, people bilking my tax dollars to get this that and the other thing, education, food, health care. All those kinds of issues came boiling forward in my mind and I said: "What is going on here." Then I went back and it said "feed the hungry", very simply "feed the hungry." Well, of course, immediately I look for a loop hole. Feed the hungry if or feed the hungry who, I didn't find a loop hole. Feed the hungry. Jesus' command is to feed the hungry with no extra label next to it, no qualifying clause that says which hungry

are deserving for food. Just feed the hungry. I thought, Lord, now didn't you know that I would be in a quandary over this, didn't you know that this wasn't as comfortable as I'd like it to be. And God said: "Yes, I know you're not comfortable with that but listen again. Feed the hungry."

It reminds me of some time ago, because I'm older I remember these times, we used to call children who were born whose parents were not married illegitimate, do you remember that. Illegitimate children, how can a child be illegitimate? That is a child, and that is a person. Jesus looks at me and says: "This person is hungry, feed him." Well I wasn't comfortable with all that so I moved on.

Welcome the stranger. Let me tell you, when I come to church I'm looking forward to seeing my friends, and I want to chat with them and I want to catch up on the latest and I want to do those little bits of business that are there and that sort of thing, and the newcomer isn't on my radar screen at all because all these other people are in the way. Welcome the stranger. Might I suggest to you that part of Sunday morning happens after the Service? Part of why we are here happens after the Service because that's when I can welcome a stranger. I used to think that if I got to church by the opening hymn and stayed through the closing hymn I had done my duty. Easy right? Well I suppose if I say "The Peace of the Lord be with you" that would take care of it. That's enough to welcome a stranger or maybe if we just get a committee, a welcoming committee, isn't that a good idea. A welcoming committee to welcome the strangers amongst us or maybe we could write it in as part of the clergy job description.

But the Scripture is saying to you and to me, welcome the stranger. Do I take time to do that? Do I remember what it was like my first Sunday in a parish? Do I remember what it was like to go to the coffee hour and have a cup of coffee in my hand and have nobody say hello to me? Do I remember those times and do I remember what it would have meant to me to have somebody say to me, "I've been a member of St. Wilfrids for five years and this is why I keep coming back, I hope you find the same thing." Welcome the stranger.

There's the story of the mail man who had a new person on the block in which he delivered mail and the neighbors discovered they were getting the new neighbors mail. They had to go over and take it to the new neighbor so they said to the mail man: "How come you misdelivered the mail?" Well he said: "You met them didn't you." Welcome the stranger. All of us, every one of us have experienced that difficult time of being new in a group of people. Being new in a neighborhood, being new in a church, being new on the job and in our hearts

crying out “won’t somebody say hello.” And so Jesus commands us, welcome the stranger.

I am delighted to compliment you today on your ministry to the sick. I can say to you what a member of this congregation said to me this week: “St. Wilfrids is a real Christian community; people reach out and help with the sick. I’m taking care of somebody who’s not well and I’ve been reached out to and people are helping me and this is happening.” Congratulations, especially if you are one of those persons who are doing it. We are so vulnerable when we are sick. We are so weak and those of us who have our health can make such a difference to the person who is not well. At the 7:30 service one of the parishioners said to me: “My husband is really sick and I’m not very good at taking care of the sick.” I said: “Your husband’s sick, God will give you the wherewithal to do that.” It happens. If the ministry is there, God will supply you with the wherewithal to do the ministry. Keep it up.

Visit those who are in prison. Is there anybody in the congregation this morning who knows somebody in prison? One, two, three, four, five. One of my friends called “Billy the Felon”, that’s what I call him “Billy the Felon”, has been in prison the last twenty years more than he’s been out of prison. He’s in prison right now. But the last time he got out of prison, the injunction against the prisoner coming out of prison is that you see your Parole Agent immediately. Five-fifteen he was in Santa Ana to see his Agent and the Agent was not there and Billy had no place to stay that night. That’s our system, that’s what’s going on in California. I wrote to my Assemblyman, Mr. Harman, when the Governor was out to do the revitalization of the prison system some years ago. I said, “I’m so pleased that the Governor is going to tackle this, please support him.” But then I didn’t write afterwards when all of that fell apart and you remember two of our persons who were in charge of prison system resigned within a month of each other because it was such an awful system. Overcrowded, prisoners and guards at risk. I don’t think that when Jesus said visit those in prison that just getting there and saying “hello,” is enough. Not caring about the circumstances in which our prisoners live denies the vocation to visit the prisoner. To not care about that revolving door, people going in and out of our prisons, round and round and round is our responsibility, we cannot delegate that to our politicians. We cannot just leave it up to them to address that. Visit those who are in prison means something from the heart must be moved. It’s difficult, five of us out of the whole congregation know someone who is in prison, but all of us are responsible for our system and what is not working there and for those who are responsible for it.

The scripture today sounds very simple, feed the hungry, give something to drink to the thirsty, cloth the naked, visit those who are in prison and those who are sick and welcome a stranger. We really do have to wonder if we are the sheep or the goats because our witness to Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior is reflected in how we do all of those things. Now in the last two weeks we've had an outstanding example of Christian witness. Does that ring a bell for anybody? In the Amish people. What happened on their first interview after those five girls were brutally murdered in their schoolhouse? We must forgive, we must forgive, is what they said on national television. Our witness for all of us, we must do these things. We come here this morning to hear the word of God. We come here to pray and we come here to be strengthened with the sacrament, only so that we can go forth from here to make a difference, only so that we are changed when we walk out of this place, only so that we can see Christ in those that need and serve Christ in those who are in need.

And what does God require of us, to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God.

Amen