

Henry has been married to Stella for 48 years. Her condition worsened the last six months, but he still wants to care for her at home. On most days she doesn't recognize him. Still he does the shopping, he feeds her, he cleans up her messes. She does nothing to reward him anymore, but he wouldn't have it any other way. He doesn't feel virtuous or holy. Henry loves Stella, always has, always will.

Patricia is their daughter. She's divorced now, raising her last child alone. It's difficult caring for a teenage boy. Patricia visits her parents once a week. She "babysits" her mother while her dad runs errands. It gets Henry out of the house. For Patricia, it's the most exhausting part of the week. She never got along well with her mother, and she resents having to care for her now. But Patricia, who still goes to church, knows you're supposed to visit the sick and honor your parents. As hard as it is to stay with her mother a few hours each week, she knows it'd be harder to do nothing. Like her father, she doesn't feel virtuous or holy. But whereas Henry cares for Stella out of love, Patricia cares for her out of a sense of duty.

Mike is Patricia's ex-husband. He travels a lot, they never really got to know each other. He never goes to church, except maybe for the holidays. He earns a good wage, but contributes to no charitable organization. However, since he travels so much, he frequently meets beggars in the nation's airports. To these, Mike gives a buck or two. It helps him get the rest of his behavior off his conscience. He doesn't feel virtuous or holy. Mike shows charity because Mike feels guilty.

One night, quite mysteriously, Henry the father, Patricia the daughter, and Mike the ex all died in their homes. They appeared simultaneously before heaven's gate and saw St. Peter standing there with his wife Perpetua. Mike heard there had been some changes in the Church, but he thought this was a bit much. Peter and Perpetua were puzzled by the pilgrims. It was clear that all three of them did many good deeds, but their motives were so different they didn't know if they should number the three among the sheep or among the goats. They decided to ask Jesus.

It was the feast of Christ the King and Jesus was out celebrating with the angels. They had to wait till two in the morning when Jesus finally got home. He welcomed Peter and Perpetua. "I hope I didn't get your goat," he said sheepishly.

Peter and Perpetua posed the problem. "We've got three people here who all did acts of charity, but one acted out of love, one out of duty, and one out of guilt. Which ones go with the sheep and which ones go with the goats?"

Jesus replied, "The Gospel says feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, comfort the ill, and visit the imprisoned. Whenever you do this, you do it for me. It doesn't say how you should do this, just whenever. Motives are less important than actions. If they did it, they did it for me."

Once again Jesus identified himself with the lowly. And Peter and Perpetua opened wide the gates of heaven.