Two poems today; here's why. The Gospels for the final three weeks of the Pentecost season are parables from Matthew 25. These, along with other parables in Matthew's Gospel, often have harsh, problematic endings. Reflecting on that led to the poem "Oh, Matthew." Having done that, I felt free to look for other meanings in the parables.

Oh, Matthew!
Oh, Matthew!
Much in your gospel is delightful.
But some of your words are a baffle.

Your message rings out loud and clear
that the kingdom of heaven is drawing near.
You speak of Jesus, who came to flood
the entire earth with his saving blood.
You draw attention to human needs,
urging a response of generous deeds.
You open the grace of heaven's door
to the weary, the hungry, and the poor.

Oh, Matthew!
We are filled with gratitude
for your witness to Christ's beatitude.

But Matthew —
You also speak of many cast
into outer darkness at the Last.
And you speak of a door shut and locked,
while the voice from within says, "I know you not."
You seem to suggest there will come an hour
when some are beyond Christ's saving power.
Do you really mean to limit salvation
by condemning some to eternal damnation?

Oh, Matthew!
Cannot the one who fed 5,000 by the sea
find a way to set the obstinate free?
Cannot the one who broke death's hold
also warm hearts callous and cold?
Cannot the one of unbounded authority

welcome to friendship even his enemy?
Could not the one who rebuffed Satan‘s temptation
lead all the earth to eventual salvation?

Oh, Matthew!
I pray it may yet be
that all will be set free,
living in unity
with the Holy Trinity.

HOLY FLAME
Lord, we want to walk in wisdom
with faithful candles burning bright.
Grant this hour the gifts we need
to be lit anew day and night.

Support us with the sacraments
of wond’rous water, wine, and bread.
Though your tender heart tutor us
that by your Word we may be fed.

When we are tense, or when we tire,
may Holy Flame set us afire,
that neither slumbering nor strife
will extinguish the Light of life.

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