I used to read lots of classic whodunits – books where the reader looks for clues to solve a murder among a set of suspects, etc. But they only began to appear in England between the Wars. Think Agatha Christie. My favorite mysteries are the Lord Peter Wimsey novels by Dorothy Sayers. I've read them all, several times. A defining feature of classic mystery novels is the revelation at the end – when the detective explains who did what, why, when, and what all the clues meant.

I thought of that quality of revelation and resolution of a story as I considered Jesus' description of the Last Judgement in today's Gospel. That resolution is what is happening there. Sometimes Matthew 25 is seen only as a call to see Jesus in those in need. And it is that. But it's also a reminder in this last week of the Church's calendar, that Jesus will come again at the end of human history – this time, not as innocent baby, but as Just Judge.

And as such, He will reveal the “whys” of our lives. Both the sheep and the goats today are surprised at their eternal destination. But Jesus explains it all to them at the Last Judgement: did they love Him and care for people made in His image – or not?

We too want to understand the meaning of these lives of ours, so filled with mysteries. We hunger for meaning in our lives because we were made with a thirst for meaning in our very bones. We were not created as part of a random universe, but in the middle of a story – The Great Story written and told by God – but containing billions of smaller, shorter stories – our individual lives.

Do you know the Story? Here is the short version: In the beginning God made human beings in His image and likeness. He wanted to share His divine life with us. But, tricked by the Devil, we rebelled against God and the love He offered us and tried to become gods ourselves. Ever since we have wandered through time alienated from God and His love. We are noble – still made in God’s

image, but wounded by that sin of pride, unable to find happiness in all lesser things we substitute for God.

But God did not forget us – He loves us too much. In the fullness of time He sent His Son, who took on our human nature, into the world of time to rescue us from the enemy who enslaved us. He did this by offering His life on the cross for our lives. By His death and resurrection, He reconciled us with the Father and made it possible once more to share God's own life – heaven. Ever since, our lives are more romance novels than mysteries. We know the meaning of life, and, so, our lives as disciples are now centered on the drama of whether or not we will each say yes to God's offer of His love, that we may live in union with Him forever. Our lives are dramatic because we only have so much time to decide before the story ends in our death – or His Second Coming.

Your life is part of that story. And knowing this truth and living it makes all the difference to your happiness. We need stories. Stories

are the lens though which we view the events of our lives and make sense of them. For our society, that story/lens has historically been the Christian faith. Even those who didn't believe were shaped by it in unconscious ways. But that lens has now been abandoned by many – most? – in our society.

That is a major cause of our society's drifting and general depression. Too many of us now lack a sense of this meaning in our lives. That is the fruit of our denying or forgetting God. Without a story our lives are ultimately meaningless. Even if we try to invent meaning for ourselves (as unbelievers often do), we know deep down that our little made-up story is a fiction we tell ourselves and will die with us.

I spent part of my vacation last month reading: The Meaning of Your Life: Finding Purpose in an Age of Emptiness, by Arthur C. Brooks. Brooks is a rarity – A Harvard University social scientist who is also a daily mass going Catholic. He teaches one of the most

popular classes at the school. It's about finding happiness – and it's so popular because these smart overachievers at Harvard are often really miserable -- because they feel their lives don't have much meaning. Brooks, using social science data from experiments and surveys, etc., sets out to demonstrate what makes us happy --the meaning of our lives.

Read the book. But briefly, Brooks says there are three pillars to meaning in our lives: purpose, significance, and coherence. Purpose means having a clear direction and a reason to move forward. Purpose answers the question, "Why am I doing what I'm doing?" Significance comes from the sense that my life makes a positive difference. It answers the question, "Why does my life matter?"

Coherence is the sense that life's events form a logical, connected story, linking my struggles and accomplishments to a narrative – there's a plot to my life! It has meaning. This coherence answers the question, "Why do things happen the way they do?" The

Great Story is what gives coherence – meaning -- to our lives as Catholics.

Jesus' Judgment of the Nations in Matthew 25 can shock. It is the ultimate revelation. He proclaims eternity, heaven and hell, judgment – all things that make our unbelieving culture squirm. But in doing so, Jesus also signals something that ultimately gives us comfort. We are part of that great story – all of us. And just as our story had a beginning, it will have an ending, and what we do in between matters eternally.

We are all co-authors of our lives with God. How will your story end? As tragedy? Or as a romance with the eternally happy ending – "And Jesus and I lived happily ever after!"