



## A Conversation With a Catholic

***“So the last shall be first, and the first last.” (Matthew 20:16)***

When I attended Catholic grade school back in Hartland, Wisconsin, I heard the above Bible passage many times. But I did not clearly understand it. Whenever we had to line up in school, we had to go alphabetical. My maiden name always landed me towards the end of the line. So I was always one of the **last**. I would sometimes relate this passage more to wishing I was **first** in line and not last. After all, Jesus said that the last shall be first! But obviously I grew to understand the true meaning of this passage, which had nothing to do with where you stood in line. It was only then that I was able to apply it in my everyday life. We have all felt from time to time in our lives that we are coming in “last”. Sometimes we even wish we could be “first”. The phrase does not mean one person gains more honor than another. What Jesus is trying to express to His disciples is that while a person may be first in this life with honor or wealth that is not true in God’s kingdom. Salvation or eternal life is not earned by one’s status in this life. Luke tells us of a time when they found themselves arguing amongst themselves as to who was the greatest. *“Sitting down, he called the twelve and said to them, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.’”* Jesus also reprimanded the Pharisees; for their hatred towards sinners. They deemed themselves worthy to enter into Heaven because of their prestige and rank. Jesus told the Pharisees that the sinners they despised were being saved ahead of them: *“Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”* Matthew 21:31. What Jesus is teaching in Matthew’s Gospel is that those who are despised and rejected in this world may, in fact, be rewarded by God. As sinners, we often get caught up in the world’s way of ranking things. Alas, it’s too prone to error. Those who are first in the opinion of others (or first in their own opinion) may be surprised to learn, on Judgment Day, they are last in God’s opinion. The Scriptures commands *“humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God”*. James 4:10. Humbling ourselves does not mean you have to lack confidence or opinion. On the contrary, your understanding and desires should be imparted to God. **–Sherrie Clutts DRE**