

The king will say to those on His left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41).

On this Sunday of Meat-fare, the Gospel reminds us of the future coming of Jesus Christ as Judge. At present, we stand before the throne of God’s mercy, but an hour is coming when we will stand before His fearsome Judgement Seat. Thus, each moment we live is a gift because the Lord in his abundant mercy is ready in each moment to forgive us who repent of our sins.

The coming of Jesus Christ, the Judge, is called the *Last Judgement*, one of the four last things: death, judgment, heaven and hell. In the end, each one of us will be in only one of two places: heaven or hell. Many people today, including many Christians, do not want to hear about such things, but the repeated warnings of our Divine Savior throughout the NT are quite clear.

How then can we find ourselves among His flock, among the sheep at His right hand?

The NT describes of two judgments. The first judgment, at the moment of our death, marks a final choice—a choice between accepting or rejecting divine grace.¹ At death, we will enter into the blessedness of heaven, either immediately or after a purification, which we call purgatory,² or we will enter everlasting torment, that is, hell.³ Examples from the NT, of this first judgement, are Christ’s words on the cross to the good thief, “This day you will be with me in paradise”, and the story of the rich man who neglected poor Lazarus. At death, the rich man found himself crying out to Father Abraham, “...have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire” (Luke 16:24).

¹ CCC 1021

² Cf. Council of Florence (1439): DS 1304; Council of Trent (1563): DS 1820; (1547): 1580, *Benedictus Deus* (1336): DS 1000, Cf. *1 Cor* 3:15; *1 Pet* 1:7, Cf. Council of Lyons II (1274): DS 856, St. John Chrysostom, *Hom. in 1 Cor.* 41, 5: PG 61, 361; cf. *Job* 1:5, CCC 954, 1030, 1472.

³ CCC 1033-1037; Cf. Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus* (1336): DS 1002.

So, the *first* judgment takes place at the moment of our death. The *second* or Last Judgement occurs at the end of time, when Christ returns. “The Last Judgment will reveal, even to its furthest consequences, the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life”.⁴ The things that we do, good or bad, have ongoing consequences long after we are gone.

St. Therese of Lisieux, known as the Little Flower, was only 25 years old when she died. Her feast day, on our Byzantine Catholic liturgical calendar, is October 1st. Therese lived a completely obscure life as a Carmelite nun at a monastery in France. She would become, however, known around the world, bringing about a vast number of conversions through her autobiography and the witness of those who knew her. One hundred years after her death, in 1997, Pope John Paul II, proclaimed St. Therese a Doctor of the Church. Her life, although quite short, obscure, and seemingly insignificant,

impacted, for the better, innumerable lives long after she was gone, and even to this day. Who could have imagined this?

At the Last Judgement, then, the full extent of the consequences of her life will be made known to her and to everyone. This is true for all the good that we do, or fail to do, and for all the evil we do as well. In this life, however, The Lord wants to forgive us, no matter what we have done, no matter how frequent or serious the sins we have committed. Scripture says that God, “...desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4).

But think of those who willfully, freely, and knowingly commit grave sins (and this is the most important point here), *died when turned away from God, unrepentant*. Those who die unrepentant of grave sin, will be without God forever. This is the chief suffering of hell—eternal separation from God. In God alone can we possess the life and happiness for which we were created

⁴ CCC 1039

and for which our hearts ache with longing.⁵ This is the ultimate tragedy of anyone's life, to be forever alone and without love. *But it's not the sins that we have committed that loses God forever. It is the unrepentant heart.*

God is the fulfillment of all the longings of the human heart—the longing to know and to be known, the longing to love and to be loved. We are made for God. If our eyes could have desire, would it not be to see? Just as the eye is made to see, we are made to know and to love. And our desire to know and to love has no limit. Thus, we are made for God, who is Himself, love without limit. The human person, then, by unrepentant sin, by rejecting God, is like the eye that chooses blindness. This is what sin is like, choosing to do those things which are opposed to how we are made, opposed to our own good, true fulfillment and happiness. In many ways, hell is self-inflicted, but we cannot save ourselves. We need God's intervention in our lives; we need His grace to bring

us out of our sinful, self-centeredness, to save us from eternal sadness.

Judgement, then, is about love, love of God and love of neighbor. It concerns, primarily, the relationship of love that each of us has, or does not have with God. But God has taken on our human nature in Jesus Christ, and He is in the midst of our relationships. Thus, the Lord can truly say to us, "I assure you, as often as you did it to the least of my brothers, *you did it to me*" (Mt 25:40).

What a terrible thing if we were to find ourselves among the goats on the Lord's left hand, separated forever from God, who is the source of all happiness. We are living in the age of Divine Mercy. No matter how old, no matter how young you are, do not waste the precious time you have remaining. The Lord will help you and embrace you, like the father embraced the prodigal son, no matter how many times you fall. God knows our weakness. He

⁵ CCC 1035.

understands our frailty. He only asks that we turn to Him, that we truly repent, and seek His mercy, His forgiveness.

It seems, however, that very many Christians take their sins too lightly. In doing so, they take God's mercy for granted. This is the sin of presumption. "God would never send anyone to hell; He doesn't really care about these things that I do; it's okay". We know, however, from the teaching of our Lord and the Apostles, that this is a dangerous thing to do.

Now, it is certain that we must die. And there is nothing of greater importance than in that moment we are right with God. The point in which we are facing death is *the* pivotal moment of everyone's life. In that moment is decided our eternal happiness or our eternal unhappiness. Given this truth, how does it happen that so many Christians live as if they were never to die. They fail to take their sins seriously and properly repent of them, because, at least, in part, they do not think of death. And so, if grave illness comes suddenly upon them, and they are in agony and fearful, they will

most likely call to God only because they wish either to escape pain and death, or avoid hell, but not because they have true sorrow for their sins and love for God. Think of this like someone who ignores you and treats you badly. But when he is in dire need, he calls you his friend and pleads for your help. In our last moments, we might not even be able to think clearly. Even worse is if our death is unforeseen, if we fall into a coma or die suddenly. Jesus warns us,

Reconcile quickly with your adversary, while you are still on the way to court. Otherwise, he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison (Matt 5:25).

Can we begin to see that the present moment is the time to repent and not when we are about to meet the judge? We should, then, live a life of repentance.

If you were a ship's captain, would you go out into the wide-open sea and into the tempest of a storm, without proper preparation, without lifeboats and life jackets? Many people are quite shrewd in matter of career and business. They know how to plan ahead, mitigate risks and avoid losses. They take great pains to

secure their future. Would they be wise business people to not plan ahead, but wait until they are in the middle of a financial crisis? Better yet, if you were charged with a serious crime, such that you could end up in prison for life, would you wait until your day in court to prepare your defense? If you had a life-threatening illness, would you wait until the last moment to take the cure? In all of these cases, would it not be incredible foolish to act this way? But this is not about the attainment or loss of earthly things. This concerns heaven or hell. How important to you is eternal happiness, complete fulfillment, being known and loved for your own sake, without end or limit. St. Paul, referring to a passage from the prophet Isaiah, says, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9). Consider the awesome reality of heaven, and the horrific and unending suffering of hell. Knowing what is at stake, what should we be doing? Do now with your life what you wish you would have done when death is near.

During the Great Fast, the season of repentance, come to the Court of God’s Infinite Mercy! Come to the Holy Mystery of Repentance. If you present yourself there often and confess your sins with a sincere and contrite heart, with a desire to sin no more, He will strengthen you with His grace, heal you, and bestow on you His forgiveness and transforming love. If you sin against God or neighbor, no matter how many times, and even if you sin gravely, *never* be discouraged. But calmly, with a peaceful, humble heart, and unshakeable confidence in Jesus, turn to Him for His mercy, and then begin again. Always begin again, and *never* look back, but *always* look forward to eternal life. Do not be afraid or ashamed. Our Father, St. John Chrysostom says, “Be ashamed when you sin, not when you repent”. Remember, that all of heaven rejoices when one sinner repents. Repent of your sins and then strive to love.

The Apostles Peter once said, “Above all, hold unfailing your love for one another, since *love covers a multitude of sins*” (1 Peter 4:8). Repent, and then love, in word and deed, and cover the

multitude of your sins. Strive then to love God and your brothers
and sisters. If you live this way, that is, if you seek to live a life of
repentance and love, you will have nothing at all to fear before the
judgment seat of Christ. You will hear the king say to you,

Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for
you from the foundation of the world (Matt 25:34).