

Homily on the Sunday of the Last Judgement

Sunday, 3 March 2019

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Today is the Sunday of the Last Judgement. One more week and our journey through Great Lent begins. Our great journey to Pascha. Today is also Meatfare Sunday, the last day on which we can eat meat.

We have just listened to the Gospel reading of Saint Matthew on the Last Judgement.

Here is a discourse, which is not simply a parable, but a prophecy of the Universal Judgement that will indeed come.

Since the Cross is now near to Him, Jesus raises the hearer to the sight of the glory of the Son of Man on His judgment seat and the whole world before Him.

The day of the Last Judgement is the day that only God knows when it will come!

We are given signs of it in the Gospel and in the Apocalypse of the holy Apostle John the Theologian. Revelation speaks of the events at the end of the world and of the Last Judgement primarily in images and in a veiled manner.

However, the Holy Fathers have explained these images, and there is an authentic Church tradition that speaks clearly concerning the signs of the approach of the end, and the Last Judgement.

Before life on earth ends there will be agitation, wars, civil war, hunger, earthquakes... Men will suffer from fear, they will die expecting calamity. There will be no life, no joy of life, only a tormented state of falling away from life. Nevertheless, there will be a falling away not only from life, but also from faith, and "when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8)

Or they will become proud, ungrateful, they will reject Divine law. The falling away from life will be accompanied by a weakening of moral life. Good will disappear and evil will reign.

Does this sound familiar to you?

It should. You only need to look around you, watch the news or read the newspapers. The news is full of stories about agitation, wars, civil war, hunger, earthquakes... There is not a place on earth which is free from these things. And things are not getting any better.

In the Western World, for instance, Christianity is slowly but surely being eradicated. And this with governmental consent and insistence. What is the world coming to when even in the UK a man was arrested for preaching the Gospel in public, which police officers called "a breach of the peace".

But also, as the Holy Fathers say, Man is becoming more and more proud, ungrateful and rejecting Divine law. Everything nowadays turns around the self, the ego. Only oneself is important and other people do not matter or are considered as a nuisance, a hindrance for Man trying to achieve his personal objectives; self-satisfaction and self-gratification.

Living a life in Christ takes up too much precious time that could be otherwise invested in more worldly pursuits. And we cannot have that, can we?

What about Orthodox Christians who consider it much more important to have a lie-in on Sundays or use their Sundays for leisure activities. Or those who keep telling others about their proud Orthodox heritage but only come to church on Feast days, or just at the time of Communion, to quickly disappear afterwards.

I know I am preaching to the converted here, as the people who should be hearing this homily are the ones who are conspicuous by their absence. So, I kindly ask you to spread this message.

Because when the day of the Last Judgement will come, the living and the dead will be judged. And although during the Litany of Supplication following the Great Entrance the following words are heard:

"A Christian ending to our life, painless, blameless, peaceful and a good defence before the fearful judgement seat of Christ", it is very unlikely that we will be given an audience with Christ and have a last chance to repent for our sins.

Most likely, it will be sudden and instantaneous for all of us. There will be no repenting for past sins. If you have not repented for your sins before then, it will be too late.

In his book 'The Orthodox Way', Metropolitan Kalistos gives us a little more insight to what the Last Judgement is: "The Last judgement is best understood as the moment of truth when everything is brought to light, when all our acts of choice stand revealed to us in their full implications, when we realise with absolute clarity who we are and what has been the deep meaning and aim of our life.

And so, following this final clarification, we shall enter – with soul and body reunited – into heaven or hell, into eternal life or eternal death.

Christ is the judge; and yet, from another point of view, it is we who pronounce judgement upon ourselves. If anyone is in hell, it is not because God has imprisoned him there, but because that is where he himself has chosen to be.

The lost in hell are self-condemned, self-enslaved; it has been rightly said that "the doors of hell are locked on the inside".

The standard of judgment in today's Gospel reading is mercy toward others. The works produced by faith are emphasised, for saving faith always produces righteous works. What we do reflects our inner state.

We read that the standard of judgment is how we treat the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner. To the extent that we serve these needy people, we serve our Lord, God, and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And to the extent that we neglect them, we neglect Him. Christ says to the righteous, "In that you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

And He says to those headed for punishment, "In that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

We learn from this passage that our relationship with God is shown in our relationship to the people we encounter every day.

The Christian life does not require us to perform extraordinary displays of asceticism and piety, but instead to become living icons of our Lord's love and mercy in the day-to-day details of our lives, in how we deal with others, how we use our time, energy, and all our gifts and resources.

What we need to do is love and help our neighbour, even if we do not really like him, because that is what Christ is asking of us.

But he is also asking us to be humble because that is what the righteous are in today's reading when they ask Christ "When did we do this? When did we feed you when you were hungry? When did we see you and you were naked and we clothed you? When did we see you sick or in prison?"

They know they did all this but were too humble to boast about it.

On the other hand, the unrighteous asked the exact same question. Why?

Because they know they did not do those things

What we need to do now is to sit down and reflect upon our actions as Orthodox Christians and pray to God and beg Him to give us love and humility. We need to ask God for forgiveness of our sins. We need to show real remorse, and repent for our sins. Because if you do not repent for your sins, it is only an empty gesture.

When should we do this? At all times. But let us take things one step at a time. Why not start now, one week before the start of Great Lent. There is no better time to sit still for a while and reflect upon one's actions.

What we also need to do is attend the Divine Liturgy, to fast, go to confession and take communion. These all form part of our life in Christ.

Let us not forget that Orthodox Christian is not just a name we call ourselves, but a way of life, with all its ups and downs. Nobody ever said that it would be easy.

Amen.