

Homily on the Last Judgment (2008)

1 Corinthians 8: 8 – 9: 2; St. Matthew 25: 31- 46

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Yes, God's glory is forever. What will our relationship to it be? Will we bask in its radiance, grow in its light, or will it burn us? Will we turn our back on it to live in darkness? Given the immortality of our souls and God's plan to remake the world in perfection, this question is paramount.

- The Final Judgment which Christ describes to us today is the moment of separation between us and eternal perfection or eternal suffering. Paradise or Hell. Fulfillment and joy or loneliness and despondency.
 - God is our Loving Father. He has prepared a place for you so that you might “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”.
 - Listen closely, because He is telling you how to come into your inheritance. He wants us all to come and enjoy this eternal paradise – but if you have not prepared, then you will not be able to accept it.
- One question that often comes up is “if God loves people, then why does He condemn some of them to eternal punishment.” This sense is very strong. Few churches preach hell. In a recent survey, half as many people believed in Hell as believed in heaven. I myself find the concept difficult. But the truth is the truth. And if it makes you uncomfortable, then you must either reject it and live a lie, or grow into it. And, my friends, Orthodoxy is liberating – there is only love here, and that love is for all. SO trust God and grow in His Way.
- **God did not design this punishment for us.** He designed *the paradise* for us. And he designed us to inherit it. It is a place of eternal peace, joy, and perfection. How is it possible for a person without peace in their hearts, without joy in their hearts, who is perfect in nothing but selfishness to enjoy such an inheritance? Three (imperfect) analogies to help make this point:
 - 1. Business world. What if a father had built up a successful business ,the very best business, for no other reason that his heirs would take it over and run it. So that they might enjoy its success. But imagine that the heirs did not bother learning how to run a business. Growing up, they did not learn from their father. In college they rejected his plan and studied something else. When they came into their inheritance, it would be to their ruination. It would be stressful. They would not enjoy it. It would be torture because they were not suited for their inheritance. They had prepared themselves for something else. It did not fit them.
 - 2. Academic world. Mathematics has a real purity and beauty. In order to appreciate the beauty of it, then you have to spend a lot of time studying it. Mastering it. The mastery of calculus brings a new appreciation for the beauty of this world and its forms. Someone who has spent time learning mathematics sees a new math problem as a chance to participate in this beauty. To participate in God's perfection. To commune with Wisdom. Those who have not prepared will see it as a time for stress and failure. The same is true about languages and perhaps even music. You have to master the art

- to really enjoy the fruits. Someone who has mastered a foreign language can really enjoy visiting the foreign country. One who has not worries about staying alive!
- Heaven is perfect peace. Perfect joy. Perfect love. If you have not built up a capacity for these virtues in your life, then facing them in their perfect form will not be enjoyable. It would be stressful. It would be torturous. Like trying to run a business you weren't capable of running, or taking a math exam you had not prepared for, or studying literature in a language you had not mastered.
 - The analogies above can give a misleading impression because the choice of business, math, and language are arbitrary. If you don't excel at one job, then there are others you can (and a loving father would not force you to do something you hated). Some people are not well suited to math. The person who does not learn a foreign language can enjoy growing in the culture of their home.
 - But Heaven is not arbitrary. **Its foundation is Love because Love is the foundation of perfection.** You may not have been made with a capacity for business, or mathematics, or music, or languages. BUT YOU WERE MADE TO LOVE. Because you were made in the Father's image (who loved us so much He gave us His Son). Because You have been joined to the Body of Christ, who heals the infirm, clothes the naked, who loves us so much He suffered and died for us. Because the Holy Spirit has been sealed within you. The Spirit that brings peace to your soul and allows you to share that peace with all around you. You were made to love. But what have you done with it?
 - Have you seen the hungry and fed them?
 - Have you seen the thirsty and given them drink?
 - Have you seen the stranger and taken them in?
 - Have you visited the sick and those in prison?
 - If we have not done these things, then we have no love in us. If there is no love in us, then we have no capacity to enjoy our inheritance. If we have no love, then the eternity God has prepared for us will be nothing but stress and pain.

God designed a perfect paradise for us. The time will come, indeed is at hand, when He will judge us. Will our inheritance be for us an eternity of joy, or of darkness?

If you have turned away the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, and the imprisoned. Then repent now. If you have lived your life in the foreign land like the prodigal, then run home. He will run out to greet you. There is always time to begin anew. God desires that all of us be saved and enjoy His reward. Lent is a time to come back. To grow in our capacity to love through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. To Grow in Christ through His Mysteries of Confession, Communion, and Anointing with Oil. Why wait? Begin today. Accept Christ into your heart and accept Him into your body. Grow in Him and His love so that you might enjoy your inheritance.

So that one day the King will say to you: "Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world".