

SERMON on Meatfare Sunday - The Last Judgement - Matthew 25:31-46
Based on the Homilies of St. John of Kronstadt
February 23, 2020

Who says these words: "I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead"? Every Christian does. This is the seventh article of the Creed, the symbol of our faith. If every Christian says these words, then without a doubt so do I and so does each and every one of you. I would ask all of us, myself included, to take a few moments to ponder these words. If we truly believe in these words that we pray so often, do we feel prepared in our conscience to give an answer to our Lord for how we live our lives and for all of our words and deeds? Let's take a look at how we spend our time. In all the hours in the week, how much time do we spend actually preparing our soul and by doing good deeds? By the same token, how much of our precious time is spent on wasteful or self-satisfying activity? St. Gennadios, patriarch of Constantinople, says in his treatise "On the Christian faith and Life" that "Those who desire eternal joys partake little of earthly ones". Time was given to each of us by the merciful Savior to come to our senses, repent, correct ourselves, stock up with an excess of oil and mercy and every virtue, in order not to be ashamed at the judgement. Thus, let us take care to become lambs of meekness and gentleness, love and compassion, patience and long-suffering, humility and obedience, temperance and purity, and let us flee all the opposites of these virtues. We should not be complacent or careless about our salvation. Quite the opposite. St. John of Kronstadt says "A Christian ending is a reward for true Christians. Repent as much as you can during your lifetime, and then you will meet a peaceful death with sincere repentance." Think, maybe, as it says in Luke 12:20, "this night your soul will be required of you." We don't know when that day will come and, as it says in Holy scripture, it can come at any time like "a thief in the night." In an instant our whole world can change at any time and we will find ourselves standing and facing our Lord. In John 9:4 our Savior says, "Work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day: the night is coming when no one can work." We should shun vanity and look upon our poor soul with testing eyes. Every Christian needs to go to Church, to weep over our sins, and await with great fear the day of judgement. The Church continually thinks about the judgement: morning, day and night; every day, early and late, the Church reminds her children of this great day, which will decide the fate of the entire human race; and yet how many of her children are busy with thoughts of other things that to them are more important or pleasurable to the passions and senses. We often hear that the Lord is merciful. Without a doubt the Lord is extremely merciful. Trusting in the Lord's mercy we reason that God will have compassion; we are sinners more due to our weaknesses, not because we are evil or callous....but we often forget that only the merciful shall obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7). "For judgement is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy" (James 2:13). The question we need to ponder is how well a job have we done filling our lamps with the oil of mercy and good deeds, and how can we do better? Have we really done enough and are we really ready today, right now if our time were to come, to face our Lord and give an accounting of our lives? It is up to us to become worthy to stand on the right side at the dreadful judgement, and to flee the left side. Our consciences either justify or condemn us, and all that is left to us is to listen to the just, eternal sentence of the Judge of all. Let us hasten, through sincere repentance and charity and love, to obliterate from our consciences all of our sins, voluntary and involuntary, and to write in our consciences every good deed. "Their works follow them" (Rev 14:13), says the Scripture. With God's help, may our works all be good ones and may all of our lamps be filled to the brim and overflowing with works of love, charity and good deeds. Amen.