

“I DID NOT COME TO JUDGE THE WORLD, BUT TO SAVE THE WORLD”

Sunday of the Awesome Judgment

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Today's Gospel reading (Mt. 25:31-46) speaks about the last, decisive meeting with Christ, which awaits all of us, when we will cross over from this life into the life of the future age.

From the words of Christ about the Awesome Judgment we discover that the sole criterion according to which the sheep will be separated from the goats, is the relationship between a person and his neighbors. The Lord will not ask us at the Last Judgment, did we keep the fasts, did we make poklons, did we read our rule of prayer — although, namely, many consider this to be the main purpose of the Christian life. The Lord will ask us how we demonstrated our faith in Him by our actions, that is to say, how did we treat Him in the person of the least of His brethren — our neighbors: did we perform good deeds or did we walk past them, not paying attention to Christ, who was standing in our path?

For centuries people thought of the Awesome Judgment as a grandiose and horrible event; it was depicted as a terrible and inexorable Judgment at which the sins and good deeds of people will be calculated. Human fantasy painted the tortures of sinners who were sent to the cursed fire, where they endure eternal punishment for their sinful deeds. However, this is not how the Gospel account describes it: it says that God is love. The Old Testament image of a God-Punisher, “*visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation*” (Num. 14:18), was changed in the New Testament by the tidings of a God Who loves mankind, Who Himself became a Man and died on the Cross for the salvation of people. Namely, in the face of God's love and Christ's love, with the love of the Cross we will find ourselves at the Awesome Judgment.

From the Gospel we know that God does not want to judge people, but to have mercy and to save. “*The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the son,*” testifies Christ (Jn. 5:22). Concerning Himself He says: “*I did not come not to judge the world, but to save the world*” (Jn. 12:47). Thus, neither the Father nor the Son want to judge mankind. Who, then, will judge mankind at the Awesome Judgment? We will be judged by the person who knocked at our door and we did not bring him in and give him shelter, the one who asked for food and we did not feed him, the one who was sick and we did not visit him. Our neighbors will judge us, the ones who we ignored and payed no attention to when they stood on our path — the hungry, the thirsty, the naked and the homeless. We will be judged by the co-suffering love of God, to which we proved to be unfaithful. In the final analysis it is we who will judge ourselves when we will understand that there is no place for us there, where God's love communes the children of God who imitated Christ by showing love and mercy.

Every day we encounter Christ who asks us for help. On the streets, in the subway, in underground passageways and next to the doors of churches — everywhere we see the poor — this means that when we walk past Christ we forfeit our chance to do good to the Lord. It is understood that we can't give alms to every poor person that we meet, since today there are too many, but it is necessary to help at least some of them. And as for those for whom we did not have enough money, we must pray for them with co-suffering love — asking the Lord that He Himself will help them. The most terrible thing is to pass by a poor person and to totally ignore him. Wasn't it because of this that the rich man was judged, that he ignored poor Lazarus, who laid at his gates?

St. Symeon the New Theologian says: “He who gave one coin to ninety-nine poor, but insulted one poor man or hit or drove him away and gave him nothing — to whom has he done this, except, of course, to Him who said and always says: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40)? Whoever gave alms to a hundred poor, but was able to give to even more, to give them to drink and to feed them, and refused many who begged him and appealed to him, such a person will be judged as one who did not feed Christ,

because He exists in each one of them, and through each of the “least” of these we feed Him. Whoever today gave everyone everything that they needed, but being able to do the same thing again tomorrow scorns one of the brothers and leaves him to die from hunger, it is the same as if he scorned Christ Himself and left Christ to die from hunger.”

I repeat: we cannot feed everyone who is hungry, clothe everyone who is naked, visit everyone who is sick and visit everyone who is in prison. But we are able at least to do good for someone or some people, especially for the needy, the hungry, the thirsty and the sick who the Lord sends directly to us. We all know such people — in our families, at work, in church: we know about their needs and we can help them, or — not help them. If your friend is hospitalized, then visit him. If a relative, or a neighbor who lives near you or a co-worker finds himself in need, then give him some money. If you are unable to help by offering money, then share your food or your clothing with him. “You have nothing? Comfort him with your tears”, — says St. Gregory the Theologian. Comfort your neighbor with warm heart-felt words, co-suffering and empathy, share at least something with him, only don’t totally abandon him in his grief, don’t walk past him and ignore him.

The Awesome Judgment, at which the sheep will be separated from the goats, begins here and now on the earth. It occurs every time we are alone with the poor, the needy and the suffering. We are judged every time we turn away from a cry for help and every time we are so immersed within our ourselves and our own cares that we don’t notice the griefs and needs of others around us. We don’t have to wait for someone to ask for help. If an elderly person lives near you that no one takes care of, you yourself go to him and offer to help him. If you find out that someone you know is homeless and without the means to live, go and offer to help him before he asks you for help.

The encounter with a person who is needy or poor is an encounter with Christ. This is the Awesome Judgment which we experience now, before the final Judgment of mankind, of each and every one of us which will take place at the end of history. What we do or do not do now in this life for the needy will determine our fate. If we are now able to pass the test of co-suffering and love, then when the time comes, it won’t be terrible for us to stand before Christ. If during our life we are faithful to offering and sharing the love of Christ, then the judgment of that love will not be catastrophic for us. If we helped someone in this life, then at the final Judgment that person will stand next to us and speak on our behalf before Christ. If we fed and gave drink to Christ in the person of the needy and the suffering, then when we stand at the Judgment seat before Christ, we will recognize Him, because in our former earthly life we encountered Him many times. At that time He will recognize us as well and say: *“Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Mt. 25:34).

Translated from the Russian by Archpriest Peter Olsen