

SUNDAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

Matt. 25:31-46

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Today the Church draws our attention to what is most important ~ eternal life. The length of time that we spend on this earth is beyond compare when we consider the duration of eternal life beyond the grave. Our Lord asks in the Gospel, "For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life" (Mark 8:36)? The Lord spoke many parables on the theme of the Last Judgment: for example, the parables of the two debtors (Matt. 18:21-35, Lk. 7:36-50), of the weeds among the wheat (Matt. 13:24-43), of the fishing net (Matt. 13:47-50), of the foolish rich man (Lk. 12:16-21), of the necessity of watchfulness (Lk. 12:35-40), of the faithful and unfaithful servants (Lk. 12:42-48), of the barren fig tree (Lk. 13:6-9), of those invited to a great banquet (Lk. 14:16-24), of the faithful and the unfaithful servant (Matt. 24:45-51), and of the wise and the foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), to name a few.

We speak of a "Last Judgment," but really judgment begins here and now, for how we treat our neighbors and our kinsmen during our earthly life will determine how we will spend eternity ~ in spiritual joy and God's love, or in eternal suffering. The Lord reveals to us today that our eternal lot will be determined by the love, mercy, kindness, generosity and care that we have shown to our fellow man. In addition to the theme of the Last Judgment, many of the parables spoken by our Savior were about our relationship with our neighbors, such as the parable of the good samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37), the parable of the good shepherd (John 10:1-18), and the parable of the two blind men (Matt. 15:14, Lk. 6:39-40). You see, all of the parables are interconnected, for our relationship with our neighbors will determine our fate on that last day.

God is mercy and forgiveness and love (1John 4:16) and the Lord did not come to judge but to save (John 3:17). If we expect this from God (which we all do), then shouldn't our neighbors and kinsmen expect the same from us? We speak of the Lord as Judge, but in reality, aren't we the authors of our own fate? On Judgment Day, the role of our Lord will be to state and confirm the fact of how we lived and who we are. "As you did it to to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40). Intentions are good, but actions speak much louder. Did we visit the sick and those in prison? Did we give alms and help to feed the poor, clothe the naked and give shelter to the homeless and the stranger? Did we offer words of support and comfort to those who were suffering and grieving for one reason or another? Kindness and love comes in many forms, and they are all praiseworthy and beneficial for the salvation of our soul. An expression of love and kindness, no matter how seemingly small, goes a long way. If we think back on our own lives, we never forget the acts of kindness and love that others have shown to us, little acts and a few small words, but they were so powerful that they lifted us up from the ground and gave us the courage and strength to go on. It may have been a monetary gift when we were in need. It may have been an arm around our shoulder and a hug. It may have been words of comfort and it may also have just been being there, silently offering us a sympathetic ear.

Next Sunday is Forgiveness Sunday, and then we will embark on the journey of Great Lent. We will be called upon to intensify our prayers, fasting, spiritual reading and contemplation, attend church services more often, prepare for and go to Confession. All of these spiritual exercises are tools to help us become cleansed of our sins and passions and grow closer to Christ and our fellow man in love, kindness and mercy. These struggles teach us humility, and humility teaches us not to be selfish, but to be generous. It takes generosity in order to learn to be willing to make sacrifices for others, in order to learn how to offer ourselves for the sake of others. The supreme example of self-sacrifice is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself Who died on the Cross for the sake of our redemption and salvation. No one among men and women has greater love for mankind than the great monastic saints and strugglers. Their holy prayers and the streams of tears that they shed out of love for man, and out of grief for the sufferings and

the sins in the world is their great and beneficial sacrificial offering of the love and mercy of which the Lord speaks today, the love and mercy for which we will be judged on that final day. All of the people whom we have helped in our lifetime will stand next to us on Judgment Day. God forbid that we should stand alone. If we have fed and nourished Christ in the personhood of the needy and the suffering, then we will recognize the Lord on Judgment Day, because we have seen His face and encountered Him many times in the faces of everyone whom we have helped in our earthly life. Then He will also recognize us, and he will say to us: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). Amen.

