

**SUNDAY OF THE LAST JUDGEMENT
MEAT-FARE SUNDAY
JANUARY 29/FEB 11, 2007**

I CORINTHIANS 8: 8-9:2

ST. MATTHEW 25: 31-46

by

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Gospel: *When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory:*

And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in:

Naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me.

Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink?

When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee?

Or when we saw Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.

Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink:

I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not.

Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee?

Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

As the first fruits of future chastisement are secretly present in the souls of sinners, so the foretaste of future blessings is present and experienced in the hearts of the righteous through the activity of the Spirit. For a life lived virtuously is the kingdom of heaven, just as a passion-embroiled state is hell.

[St. Gregory of Sinai, *On Commandments and Doctrines*, No. 38, p. 219 in *The Philokalia, Volume Four* (compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth), Faber and Faber Limited, London, UK, 1998 (paperback edition - first published 1995)]

On the Right and Left Hand of Christ

Christ will come in “His glory,” escorted by angels at His Second Coming. Immediately, He will separate His sheep, the saints, from the goats (sinners). He sets the sheep on His right hand and then speaks to them. He calls them sheep because they are gentle, yielding “fruit and spiritual protection” for us as a sheep provides wool to clothe and thus protect and milk to nourish us. His sheep provide “divine and spiritual protection”. The goats are sinners and are lined up on the Lord’s left:

“...they walk along the precipices and are unruly and fruitless”.¹

Examination

The Great Judge examines the goodness (or not) of us *before* He renders Judgment. Our punishment or honour must await His ‘review’ of the spiritual evidence. Did we feed those who

were hungry, give drink to thirsty souls, take in strangers, clothe the naked, visit the sick, minister to the incarcerated? I.e., did we come to Christ Jesus *really*? The Lord will conduct a thorough examination of our spiritual ‘standing’. Have we practiced what we preached? Has our faith produced the fruit of good works as demonstrates true faith in Christ?

Who are “Blessed”?

The saints, He calls “blessed” because they have been accepted by His Father, Who “considers them to be inheritors of the kingdom to show that God makes them participants in His own glory as His sons”.² They *inherit* God’s Kingdom as one would an estate from his father. Saints participate in God’s glory as sons of Him; thus they inherit His kingdom.³ Our objective as Orthodox Christians is nothing less than deification, which leads to our inheritance of Christ’s Kingdom.

The Least Brethren

Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.

Christ means His own disciples or all the poor. All the poor are His brothers (brethren) because both the Lord and they lived their lives in ‘poverty’. When we do things for the poor, the Lord accepts them as having been done for Him.⁴

What does He mean by “goats”?

If we have acted cruelly, maliciously, and/or without compassion, God sends us into the fire (hell) He prepared for the devil:

The Dread Judgment knows no witness or court records. Everything is inscribed in the souls of men, and these inscriptions, these ‘books’ will be opened. Everything will become clear to all and to oneself; the state of a person’s soul sends him to the right or the left. Some will go to the place of rejoicing, others to the place of horror. When the books have been opened it will become clear to all that the root of all transgressions is in a man’s soul.⁵

But those on the left are not punished for criminal acts or licentious behaviour. Rather, they are punished because they have failed to do *good*. If we fail to give assistance to those in need, we do injustice to everyone we could have helped. Those failing to show their faith by ‘doing good’ for their neighbours “shall go away into eternal punishment which never ends; but the righteous shall enter into eternal life”.⁶

No End to Hell

Contrary to Origen, who contended that hell had an end and sinners will not be punished forever; that they would enter the righteous place after suffering in hell, there is *no* end to the punishment

of the unjust. Christ speaks of “everlasting punishment,” meaning *never* ending. As goats cannot become sheep, a sinner cannot be cleansed thus becoming righteous “after the Judgement”.⁷ The Lord’s words are clear. There is no hope for conversion after we have died and an examination has been made of our conduct: “then the outer darkness in its turn receives him”.⁸

What Must We Do to Avoid This Fate?

Bl. Theophylact tells us forcefully:

You, then, O reader, flee from this absence of compassion, and practice almsgiving, *both tangible and spiritual* (emphasis supplied). Feed Christ Who hungers for our salvation. If you give food and drink to him who hungers and thirsts for teaching, you have given food and drink to Christ. For within the Christian there is Christ, and faith is nourished and increased by teaching.⁹

In today’s Gospel, Christ has set out six types of love, bodily and spiritually, we need to ‘put into action’. These types are not to be understood as purely literal, e.g., if a person has turned away from the Lord, from his “garment of incorruption” received at baptism, he can be considered naked (without spiritual cover). Clothing that individual can mean leading back to faith. Similarly, help those whose faith falters or is weak, visit a person “shut up in the dark prison of this body and give him counsel which is a *light to him* (emphasis supplied).¹⁰

Christ wants us to be saved. He has done His part and continues to do so everyday through the Holy Spirit. But we have free will. Let’s make sure we exercise free will for Him in *this* life to prepare for the next. Yet, remember it will be ‘too late’ after our stint in this life is over to convert to Christ and His ways, then receive salvation. There is no ‘overtime’!

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

¹ Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Vol. I* in the series, Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, pp. 218-219.

² *id.*, p. 219.

³ *id.*

⁴ *id.*

⁵ Saint John (Maximovitch) of Shanghai, *Part I, Selected Sermons of Saint John of Shanghai: Brief Notes for Sermons, The Sunday of the Dread Judgment*, p.4 of 11 at http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/johnmx_sermons_1.htm.

⁶ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

⁷ *id.*, pp. 220-221.

⁸ *id.*, p. 221.

⁹ *id.*

¹⁰ *id.*