

Matthew 25:31–43
“The Last Judgment”

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.’ “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ “Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

‘For I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ (Hosea 6:6) *‘Pure religion is the care for widows and orphans.’* (James 1:27). God has been saying this long before He sent His Son to tell us and show us – as it we didn’t know what it looked like perfectly well. As we begin what you might say the preliminary fast the week in preparation of the beginning of the Great Fast next week.

The Church has been saying to us (and showing us) week after week for the last month that we have to **Earnestly turn to God** and **we have to do the best we can**. That **we have to repent** and **we have to not judge our brother**. And we’ve also seen the main thing that hinders our faith, that keeps us from repentance is this self-love (or *philouftia*) we’ve talked about.

Being concerned about our self first. Thinking of our self first. Now the world in which we live says this: “well you have to take care of yourself before you can care for others.” Have you noticed, as I have, the ones who say this, without exception do not care of anyone other than themselves? And have you noticed, as I have, that those who do care for others don’t say that? If asked they usually say you have to care for yourself as you care for others, but they do not put themselves first, because when you put yourself first, you also put yourself second and third. Or another way of looking at it is: if you are first, there is no second.

What God expects, what He has made abundantly clear, is that we are to do for others as we would have them do for us. As we come out of ourselves there is no first, there is only us...and if others are not a part of ‘us’ there really is no us – there is only me and them.

St. John Chrysostom says regarding this picture of Judgment that it does not include non-Christians. This is the judgment of those who have had the opportunity and made the

claim of knowing Him. Those outside the Church (and by Church I mean all those who've followed God from creation). As it says in Ps. 1:5 *"The ungodly shall not stand in judgment."* That is, not in this judgment. This judgment is for those who lived their lives claiming to know Him, to follow Him. This judgment is not to *decide* but to *reveal* the humble sheep who in their lives considered themselves unworthy goats and everyone else as sheep; and the goats who used the sheep toward their own ends.

This is where we (as those who claim to be followers of God) will either hear the greatest words that exist for mankind: *"Come you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the World."* or the most dreadful words ever heard by human ears: *"Depart from me you cursed. Into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."*

I want to be clear, today's teaching is not a different teaching than what you've been hearing for the last month as we have talked about the absolute necessity of this earnest desire for God expressed in seeking Him as best we can, in repentance and without judgment of our neighbor. That is not a different teaching than today's teaching on the place of love; because, as we have said many times, the goal of all of this is to overcome the source of the passions: *philouftia* (self-love), with the source of healing of all the passions: selfless-love or the love of God in Jesus Christ.

As St. Ignatius of Antioch, the early second century Hieromartyr and disciple of the Apostle John taught almost two thousand years ago: "Man is saved by communion of divine life through the human nature of Christ by love of neighbor..." (Ign. Phil. 8.)...

As his teacher (and no doubt spiritual father) the Apostle John taught him, and us, in his epistle: *'He who does not love his brother remains in death... And this is His commandment, That we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He commanded us...'* (I John 3:23)

Yes, we are saved by faith through grace. But only the faith through grace that leads us to love God and love people – and all people, even our enemies. Many will say on that day such things as, *'God, I accepted you as my lord and savior on August 12th 2004!'* Or this one we Orthodox are more familiar with: *Lord, I was baptized and a member (in good standing) of the true Church! My personal favorite: But Lord, I was a priest and minister of your Holy Body and Blood!...* And He will say the same thing: *'I was hungry and you did not feed me, I was sick and you did not care or me, I was in prison and you did visit me – depart from me... I do not know you.'*

And as I've said so many times. If we don't have this love (in increasing measure) we don't have the peace (in the same measure) that is in Christ. And if we don't have it now, we're not going to have it when we die and we're not going to have it at the last judgment.

It is here if we want it. Do we want it? If we do then we must earnestly seek God, repent, seek Him the best we can through the divine means we have in the life and teaching of the Church. This salvation or condemnation is what is really going to happen in the future, but what will keep us from this in the future is what we do now. Salvation, even future salvation that we see here – is always now – always in the present. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul meant when he quoted Isaiah 600 years earlier: *"In an acceptable time I*

*have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.” When he said, “Behold, **now** is the accepted time; behold, **now** is the day of salvation.” (2 Cor.6:2).*

The reason Christ is revealing this to us is not just to show us something we are going to get or not get. He’s revealing a picture of the end result of what we have already chosen. If we have, and are, choosing Him and are suffering, His words are a comfort and reassurance. But if we are not choosing him it is an attempt to frighten us to reconsider. ...That we will choose life.