



"The Last Judgment Is the Fairest Court Ever to Be Held"

"Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Matt. 25:34

Last Sunday we spoke of the Prodigal Son and God's incomparable compassion towards us. This Sunday our subject is Christ's Second Coming, the terrifying Judgment when "the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements themselves shall melt with indescribable heat" (2 Peter 3:12). Of this, St. Gregory Palamas adds, "Worse still than this awaits unrepentant sinners and the godless."

And on that day, God will divide the goats from the sheep with absolute dispassion. For the Last Judgment is not the burning wrath of an angry God, but rather it is the fairest court ever to be held. In this court man is not condemned for lack of favor in the sight of God, or some predestined state of being saved or damned. Each person is simply acknowledged, with eternal certainty, as what they have freely chosen to become by their own free will, in accordance with their knowledge of Truth. Those who are divided eternally from the righteous are granted this separation for it is what they have desired. We know that God has mercy on those who repent. We know also that God does not force our salvation or our condemnation, but as the Righteous Judge, confirms eternally the choice we make for ourselves.

If Christ is really the Son of God, then death, judgment, Paradise, and hell are real as well. If we accept these realities, our acceptance is the first act of faith. Faith is the first step on the path to salvation, and fear of God is the second step.

"Faith which hasn't reached fear will not lead to action. In the beginning, we aren't spiritually mature enough to feel the joys prepared for us in Paradise, so we can't be torn from the world by those joys that await us. Therefore, we must be snatched from the world by an act of power, of fright, by a great fear, by fear of God. Fear of God is experienced in two stages. The first is a fear of punishment, fear of existing forever in hell, the second is a fear caused by love, the fear of not having God's blessings, the fear of losing Paradise." —Fr. Dumitru Staniloae

Dear people of God, remember at all times that each one of us will stand before the great Judgment Seat of Christ one day; probably sooner than we think. We will stand as goats: self-willed, independent, stubborn, and rebellious; or we will stand as sheep: meek and humble, following and trusting in their Master. We are created in the image of Christ, and that image is one of loving communion and fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ, with Christ, as Christ. May we commit ourselves to not forgetting our created purpose, so



that, on the dread day, we will be prepared to enter fully into that communion with God and hear those longed-for words of reception, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.” Amen.