

## **Sunday of the Last Judgment 2006: We will be judged on our Right-Doing!**

A sermon by the Rev. Fr. David G. Subu  
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1 Cor. 8:8-9:2  
Matthew 25:31-46

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, today is the day of the Last Judgment. Today, the Son of Man speaks to us of his coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Today, we are put face to face with His holy gospel, in which the righteous and the wicked are *separated one from another as a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats*. Today may be the last chance any of us ever has to turn away from sin, and live. And while today may be the first day of the rest of our life, it is also certainly the last day of our life up until now. Who knows what the night will bring? Are we ready? The words of this Gospel provide us powerful imagery for a powerful reality. This gospel is read in anticipation of Great Lent, during which we will prepare ourselves more intensely to receive the gift of Christ's Holy Communion. And all of us will hopefully take the opportunity to confess our sins in the Church, to receive forgiveness as our Lord Jesus Christ ordained through His apostles and their successors in faith. Yet do we approach the confessional as if we were standing before the awesome judgement seat of Christ? Do we realize that in that moment when we come before the Lord and offer our lives to Him that we too will be numbered either among the righteous or among the wicked?

And many of us will come to confession and try to think of what to confess, and it will be difficult. We have all been taught to believe that we should confess those things in which we have broken the commandments of the Lord, such as one of the Ten Commandments. **But did you know that the breaking of the Law is not the most important criteria on which the**

**Lord judges us?** Indeed, no one has kept the Law in its totality except one—the Lord Himself. The Law was given to us as a teacher, to let us know that sin exists and that we are indeed sinners in need of forgiveness and salvation. But we are not sinners simply because we break the rules, even the rules of God. **To sin literally means to “miss the mark.” To miss the mark means to fail to do what you are supposed to do. We sin not so much because we did something wrong, but because we failed to do what was right.**

What’s the difference? We need only look at the gospel of the Last Judgement to see how this works. The wicked were not judged because they broke some rules or some code of behavior. They weren’t judged for being murderers, adulterers, thieves, or liars, even though St. Paul makes it clear that such sinners who do this without repenting will not inherit the Kingdom. The Lord Himself told the Pharisees who were scrupulous in piety, “Truly I say to you, tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.” (Matt. 21:31) Christ shows us what He is really interested in: he wants to know if we actually did any of the things we were supposed to. He *knows* that we fail and break the rules and do many wrong and inappropriate and even unforgivable things. For this reason He instituted the Church and Her ministry of confession and penance to be a helper and healer to us when we do mess up. But none of that matters if we never actually change our ways and do the things we were supposed to do in the first place. **It is not enough to be forgiven for wrong-doing: we must return to God through right-doing.**

The righteous were judged as such not because they had a spotless record and never did wrong. But they were blessed because they did what was right. So too we will be judged for the same. **This judgement is just, for how can we be numbered among the inheritors of the kingdom, if we never show any sign of relationship to the king? We have to become**

**recognizable as being of the same blood line as Christ to be able to be numbered among His brethren.** This is accomplished by *His grace*, accepted *through faith*, lived *in good works*. This is really very simple. When you meet someone and they say that they are related to you, do you first start to focus on how different they are from you to determine if they are related to you? No, of course not! We look at them to find the resemblance. We look to see what features we have in common. And if we see something, we say, ah of course, you have my grandmother's eyes! One of the great pleasures of parenthood is discovering how the ancestors come alive again without any effort in the features and personalities of their descendants—especially those ancestors no longer with us whom we long to see again. **So too God, when He comes to judge us, will look at us and see if we bear any resemblance to Him, any likeness. We receive the likeness by becoming more and more like God, and that means doing what God does—feeding, helping, healing, visiting, comforting, etc.**

If we don't become like Him, it stands to reason that we have yet to accept His grace, yet to really believe. Indeed, those who never have been changed by Grace have shown themselves to be not of the bloodline of the king, but rather of the family of His enemy, the devil and his angels who rejected God. The Lord will look at us if we fail in this way and say, "I see no family resemblance here. This one must belong to those others who rejected Me." Thus, while terrible beyond any tragedy in this world, it is nevertheless *just* that some receive the same reward as the demons—to be tormented by the everlasting power of God's glory that themselves ignored and rejected and rebelled against all their lives.

Brothers and sisters, very simply, when we come to confession, it is never right at all to say, "I have nothing to confess. I didn't do this bad thing or that bad thing. I don't hate anyone and I try to lead a good life." That's not a confession, it borders on a boast and the pride of the

Pharisee. We should rather say, “Forgive me, God, for I have failed to do the good things you have asked me to do. It was I who passed by the hungry while I ate well. It was I who ignored the thirsty, while I drank my fill. It was I who closed the door of my home and my heart on the strangers, because I believed their wellbeing was not my personal responsibility. It was I who hoarded my own goods while the naked go without clothing and shelter. And it was I who was too afraid or ashamed to come face to face with the captives of suffering, those imprisoned by sin and sickness. Forgive me Lord, for in so many ways I have failed to reflect your likeness in my life. Grant me now and forevermore the strength to do Thy will and start again.”

**God knows that we do many bad things and break many rules—but the biggest reason these sins are so bad is in committing them because we wasted precious and valuable time that could have been used doing God’s work and growing in His likeness.**

When we look to ourselves, let us see how far we have still to go, not how far we have come by being so-called “good Christians.” The goal of Christian life is to become nothing less than Christ is—the child of God. He is the example and the standard, not the exception. Each of us can be a saint, by God’s grace. In fact, that is the only worthwhile goal to strive for in this whole life. In fact, that’s exactly what God wants for you and is willing and able to make it happen if you accept the gift of His grace. Therefore, Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us get to work, polishing the mirror of our hearts and souls so that when we stand face to face with God He can say, “Look how this one shines, I can even see myself in the reflection!”

Let us pray to the Lord: O Lord Jesus Christ, help us to make the approaching time of Lent a time for good confessions, for true repentance in good works, for spiritual growth in communion with You and each other, and the restoration of your divine likeness in us, your humbled and tarnished icons, that we may be granted worthy to partake of your heavenly good

things, giving the glory to You, and Your Father without beginning, and Your Most-holy good and life-creating Spirit, always, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.