



Threshold of the Great Lent

Homily for the Sunday of the Last Judgment.

The Great Lent is often called a “spiritual spring,” reflecting the changes that take place in nature during this period of time, and awakening our souls from a sinful sleep to revive and blossom under the shining rays of Christ’s glorious Resurrection. Since the Great Lent is the most important time of the entire church year, preparing the faithful for the joyous “feast of feasts and triumph of triumphs,” the Church prepares us for this lent gradually, and leads us through this lent gradually and purposefully, in order that we may gain maximum benefit from it for the salvation of our souls. Thus, having taught us, in the preceding two Sundays, the *humility* of the publican and the *repentance* of the prodigal son, on this Sunday the Church leads us to the third step of preparation for the Great Lent - and that is the *fear of God*

And so before us unfolds the awesome image of the Last Judgment. First of all, we are amazed by the boundless sea of people. And we must be keenly aware that we, too, are among them. We try to find ourselves there, we try to determine our own place in accordance with our spiritual condition. In our mind’s eye we see people whose faces express terrible sadness, despair over their lost lives. There are other faces, full of rage, hate, envy, insatiable desires. Life is over, but something gnaws at them and will continue gnawing for eternity...

But now we look higher up, nearer to the Righteous Judge, and here we see other faces: they are quiet, peaceful, joyous, happy... A huge cross shines over the Seat of Judgment, and on that Throne sits the Lord Jesus Christ Himself - the Saviour of the world, surrounded by St. John the Baptist, the Apostles, the saints. They are all praying and rejoicing. There is only joyous celebration here.

And yet, this exultation is disturbed by a single cry. On Christ’s shoulder weeps the Mother of God, as She continues to plead for the redemption of sinners, for the salvation of the hopeless. She alone has been granted the power to entreat God’s mercy until the very end.

Thus, dear brethren, wherever we may feel ourselves standing at the Last Judgment, let us not despair! We are not yet lost! We still have the Mother of God, the Mother of all mankind, She is praying for us, and even the Almighty God can scarcely refuse Her. We must only have firm faith, repentance and the fear of God.

Especially in our times, dear brethren, we must have this fear of God. For us the image of the Last Judgment is not some kind of allegory or something in the distant future. On the contrary! For us, the last Christians, the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgment are a quite possible reality.

In our times, the concept of “a world lying in iniquity” has become virtual reality. Evil has spread into all spheres of human life. On a par with the destruction of nature and the destruction of the God-created beauty and harmony of our physical world, we see the total destruction of moral values, destruction of all the manifestations of beauty produced by the human soul. In the arts, in music, in literature, in human philosophy, in man’s exterior appearance - everywhere we see ugliness and distortion.

Moreover, just as the physical world now harbors a multitude of microbes and viruses that are mercilessly destroying human health, so our spiritual world is filled with the terrible viruses of apostasy and the sins of sodomy, which are destroying the souls of men, especially our youth.

Humanity now finds itself in a state worse than Sodom and Gomorrah, worse than the pagan world of antiquity, perhaps even worse than the antediluvian world. And if the Lord is refraining yet from destroying our world, it is only because there are still those who can be saved, and the Lord wishes “all of us to be saved and enter into the wisdom of truth.”

But judgment is close at hand... And the image of the Last Judgment, though it stuns us, does not lead us into despair. We can still attain humility, we can still repent, we can still feel the fear of God. It is for this purpose that we are being given this precious time of the Great Lent. And we still have a last resort - the intercession of the Mother of God.

Let us hurry to make use of all these means, dear brethren, so that we, too, may be placed on the right side of the King and hear His words: “Come, the blessed ones of My Father, inherit the Kingdom...”
Amen.

*Adapted from the writings of Archbishop
Andrew of Novo-Diveevo*