

"FROM THENCE HE WILL COME AGAIN TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD "

Jerry Johnson

"The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unflinching your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins." (1 Pet 4:7,8)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that "We are already at the 'last hour'" and the final age of the world is with us. Only God knows how long this "last hour" will be, but in this final age the renewal of the world is even now under way and anticipated in the Church, Christ's kingdom here on earth . . . until all things are subjected to him. (CCC 670)

"And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:25-28) Christ's reign, now present in his Church, will come to its fulfillment when, as He says in this passage from Luke, He visibly returns "with power and great glory". (CCC 671) His coming will usher in the "new heavens and a new earth" (2 Pet 3:13) with the definitive order of justice, love and peace. Until then we will continue to experience the trial of evil and distress as we live in this period of watching and waiting. (CCC 672) The Catechism also teaches

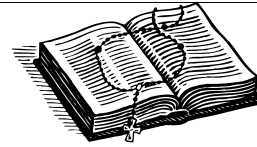
that "before Christ's second coming, the Church must pass through a final trial" and "unleashing of evil" that will shake the faith of many believers. This is why the kingdom will only be fulfilled by God's triumph over this "revolt of evil" which will "take the form of the Last Judgment after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world" (CCC 675-677)

The big question for each one of us then becomes; are we ready for this final judgment of Christ? Or for the "specific judgment" we will each receive at our death, if this precedes the Second Coming? And on what will we be judged? What will save us or condemn us at this judgment? Scripture gives us many verses which deal with these questions, but we can't make the mistake of reducing our answer to any one particular verse. As the Church teaches, we must look at the whole of Scripture to understand God's answer to our questions. Certainly, our space here doesn't allow a comprehensive explanation of our salvation or condemnation, but a short summary might look like this: St. Paul tells us that we are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). A grace and faith that both leads us to and emanates from our baptism, which St. Peter tells us "saves you now". (1 Pet 3:21) But as St. James explains, for our faith to be a living, saving faith, it must be completed by our works. (James 2:22) This goes hand in hand with Paul's description in Romans, chapter two of the "... revelation of the just judgment of God, who will repay everyone according to his works: eternal life to those who seek glory, honor, and immortality through perseverance in good works, but wrath and fury to

those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness." (Rom 2:6-8) Jesus himself describes the final judgment as a separation of those who served Him in the least of His brethren from those who did not. (Matt 25:31-45) St. Paul also lists a number of serious sins in Galatians chapter five, which will deprive us of the kingdom. As the famous John 3:16 and Rom 1:9 explain, we must believe in our hearts and confess Jesus as Lord, but this confession must also lead us to a disciple's life of obedience to the teachings of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Simply put, Jesus explained that the correct answer to the question "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" was: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." He stated "do this and you will live" (Luke 10: 25-28) If we trust in and cooperate with his grace, we will do this and all it entails, and we will live. At that final judgment we will be filled with the fullness of joy when we hear our master say "...Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...!" (Matt 25:34)

Jerry is a charter member of St. Lambert's and a catechist for 25 years. He is currently in the Master Catechist program of the diocese.

SACRED SCRIPTURE



"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation..." (2 Pet 3:10-15)

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; ..." (Eph 2:8)

"...God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water. This prefigured baptism, which saves you now. It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him." (1 Pet 3:20-22)

"Do you want proof, you ignoramus, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by

works when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by the works." (James 2:20-22)

"...at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his mighty angels, in blazing fire, inflicting punishment on those who do not acknowledge God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal ruin, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, when he comes to be glorified among his holy ones and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed,..." (2Thes1:7-10)

SACRED TRADITION

"Before his Ascension Christ affirmed that the hour had not yet come for the glorious establishment of the messianic kingdom awaited by Israel which, according to the prophets, was to bring all men the definitive order of justice, love, and peace. According to the Lord, the present time is the time of the Spirit and of witness, but also a time still marked by "distress" and the trial of evil which does not spare the Church and ushers in the struggles of the last days. It is a time of waiting and watching." (CCC 672)

"When he comes at the end of time to judge the living and the dead, the glorious Christ will reveal the secret disposition of hearts and will render to each man according to his works and according to his acceptance or refusal of grace." (CCC 682)

THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS

Are we prepared for the final judgment and looking forward to the coming of the Lord?