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The Four Last Things – Judgment (Part 2)

Last week we considered the first of the four last things, the eternal truths as we pondered death. This week we look at what follows death, judgment. Upon our death, it is our belief as Catholic Christians that we will be met by our Lord and Savior who will ***“come again in glory to judge of the living and the dead.”***

The idea of judgment resonates with our intuition of the need to pursue good and avoid evil. Judgment resonates too with our sense of justice. ***Justice*** is one of the first things we awaken to when we believe ourselves ***“sinned against.”*** We cry, ***“It isn’t fair!”*** when something has gone foul. There is a natural desire for fairness and equality we appreciate one to another. ***Justice*** is the virtue by which we actively render each person his or her “due.”

In God there is present every virtue in its perfection. As such, there is in Him perfect justice. At the same time, in God, there is perfect mercy. Mercy and justice for Him are the same thing – they cannot be otherwise. ***“Judgment”*** is not opposed to mercy, but is actually part of what makes mercy so beautiful. When the sinner rightly deserves his just deserts, the pardon rendered him without “due” shines that much more brightly than it might if each got a free pass.

So what does the judgement we speak of look like? In the Christian view is twofold. There is a *particular judgment* and a *general or universal judgment*. The particular judgment is that undergone by each person at his or her death. As the Catechism puts it, the Particular Judgment is ***“the eternal retribution received by each soul at the moment of death, in accordance with that person’s faith and works.”*** (CCC, glossary).¹

The general or universal judgment is God’s triumph over the revolt of evil, after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world. Preceded by the resurrection of the dead, it will coincide with the Second Coming of Christ in glory at the end of time, disclose good and evil, and reveal the meaning of salvation history and the providence of God by which justice has triumphed over evil.²

Where does Purgatory come in? As we celebrate the month of the ***“holy souls,”*** the ***“faithful departed”*** each November, this is an important question. When we sin, there are consequences, an ***eternal*** consequence and a ***temporal*** one. The eternal consequence for sin has been overcome by Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection. We enjoy that victory through our participation in that through Baptism and the other Sacraments. There remains however an accounting for consequences of our sins in time. When someone breaks the window, someone has to pay for it.

If God is perfectly just and merciful, only the perfectly just and merciful may abide with him for all eternity. Recognizing that man may not be able to account for the consequences of his sin in

¹ Menezes, Fr. Wade . The Four Last Things: A Catechetical Guide to Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell (Kindle Locations 464-466). EWTN Publishing, Inc. . Kindle Edition.

² Ibid. (Kindle Locations 468-472).

the here and now, God offers him time to be made just, purged of sin, so he may enter into the joy promised him. The souls in purgatory are assured of heaven, but must first be made pure in order to abide in such a place for all time.

For our part, we offer prayers and sacrifices for the faithful departed that that time of purification may be short. For our loved ones who die, we can do no greater service than to pray they may be with God forever, whatever their end may have appeared to warrant on earth. ~Fr. Matthew Biedrzycki

*Next week: **Hell.***