



## JUDGMENT SUNDAY (MEATFARE SUNDAY)

February 19

### THE GOSPEL READING

**Matthew 25:31-46**

[The Judgment of Works]

*The Lord said, "When the Son of man comes in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.*

*Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'*

*Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'*

*Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*



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## THE SERMON

This parable from Christ teaches us that at the Last Judgment, which will seal the destiny of all human beings, we will be judged according to how we practiced the virtues of faith and love. To love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Such love is not merely felt but shown through our actions. Similarly, genuine faith works in our hearts and soul and transforms our lives and the lives of others. Our faith is not only for our benefit but for the benefit of others. Therefore, *love in action* and *genuine faith* are the measurements by which we will be judged.

The Lord tells us that He will come in His glory with all His angels at His Second Coming. He will sit on His glorious throne, and all the nations will be gathered before Him. In His first coming, His Incarnation, the Lord exemplified His extreme humility. His Second Coming will display His eternal glory when He separates the sheep from the goats.

The illustration of sheep and goats would have been familiar to Christ's listeners, who were well-acquainted with livestock. Shepherds raised sheep and goats for various purposes. When necessary, they separated them, and the common way to do this was to put the sheep on the right side and the goats on the left side. The way we still pasture sheep and goats is that at some point, depending on the pasture, we separate them. This does not mean that goats are worse than sheep or that the right is better than the left side. This is just an example of separation. The point here is that the Lord will separate us.

The Lord will say to those at His right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Then He instructs us precisely what people did to inherit the Kingdom. Making Himself the One representing all human beings, the Lord says that He was hungry, and they gave Him food. He was thirsty, and they gave Him a drink. He says that He was a stranger, and they welcomed Him, was naked, and they clothed Him, was sick, and they visited Him, He was in prison, and they came to Him. In other words, those who provided for the needy in their specific needs will inherit the Kingdom. The Kingdom is an inheritance and a gift from God to those who love Him and their neighbor.

Notice how Christ identifies Himself with the poor, with those who are thirsty and hungry, with the sick, and with those in prison. To serve the needy is to serve Christ Himself. He says, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to Me." Those who served others sacrificially are placed on His right hand, a gesture of the Lord's royal favor. Some, however, chose not to help others in love. They are placed on His left hand, a symbolic gesture of His disfavor. This is the difference between love and indifference. To be indifferent to others is to be indifferent to Christ.

The people who inherit the Kingdom care for others in ways that include both physical and spiritual needs. In the Divine Liturgy, we are united in One Body, the Body of

Christ. We pray for those in need, asking “for the sick, the suffering, the captives and for their salvation . . . for our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and distress.” Our mission is to participate in the fulfillment of this prayer, not only in thought and word but also in deed. We are called to go to the world and practice true Christian love.

Serving the Lord by serving others in practical ways is a mark of Christian discipleship. After the Resurrection and before His Ascension, the Lord commanded His apostles to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He also told them to teach the disciples to observe everything He had commanded. In other words, to become a disciple of Christ means to be united with Him through baptism and live His commandments and become a disciple who loves and serves God and others.

Genuine service is best measured by acts towards those unable to repay us. The Lord sees the disposition of our hearts and knows whether we act out of faith and love or out of a desire for recognition or reward. We give, expecting nothing in return, either from the ones we bless or from God, as if He owed us anything. We serve simply out of love for Christ.

Discipleship, therefore, is about imitating Christ and becoming a vessel of His grace and mercy to others. Those who live in this way and participate in the ministry of Christ are welcomed into the Kingdom and called “blessed of the Father” in the end. If we love Him, we will follow His steps. If our faith is grounded in Him and abides deeply in our souls, our Christian identity is shown to be living and life-giving.

In this way, spiritually, we already begin to live in that Kingdom, which we will receive as an inheritance on the Last Day when the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. The Lord will say, “Come inherit the Kingdom!” This manifests God’s grace and love in our lives. God gives the gift of faith and love, and then He crowns the workings of faith and love. He is the beginning and the end, even as we cooperate with His grace – and then He rewards us for what He enabled us to do. Saint John Chrysostom says: “Of what honor, of what blessedness are these words? And He said not, Take, but, Inherit, as one’s own, as your Father’s, as yours, as due to you from the first.”

We will begin to practice this kind of faith and love as we make ourselves open and available to the Grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, Who works in and through us. Being His children, we receive the gifts of God, and He rewards our works with His eternal Kingdom. When we feed and clothe the poor, shelter the destitute, care for the sick and those in prison, and all who are in affliction and distress, we do it to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

After the Incarnation, the Lord and Creator of the universe served His people in humility. He was hungry and thirsty, He did not have a place to lay His head, and He allowed Himself to be humiliated and crucified. He did all these things for our salvation, and the Cross is the most extraordinary proof of His love. As He calls us to imitate Him in

picking up our Cross, He also calls us to see Him, His very image, in every human being, especially the suffering.

The love of God is the beginning and the end of all things. We cooperate with His Spirit as His disciples, which is the way to the Kingdom of God. As we choose to care for others, turning indifference into love and service, we continue on this path in our journey to His Kingdom. It is by serving Christ and others daily that we are counted among the sheep at His right hand and inherit the blessed Kingdom.