

Reflections on the Dread Judgment

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Thought of the Dread Judgment produces a dispiriting impression on most people, even on those who both pray to God and reflect on the salvation of their souls. It seems to them all that the words greeting the righteous bear little relation to their souls, which are more subject to the punishment pronounced to the sinful.

This was not the case with ancient Christians, who awaited the Second Coming with luminous joy; they replied to the Lord's words *Surely I come quickly*, with the words *Even so, come, Lord Jesus* (Revelation 22:20).

Did ancient Christians not consider themselves to be sinners? Yes, of course they did; but their confidence in Divine mercy and in the ultimate victory of Christ over the world was so powerful that they did not, as it were, turn their eyes from the contemplation of His future victory. Therefore, they conceived of this very future as something bright and joyful, when Christ the Savior will wipe away every tear from the face of man.

Victory was not alien to the Old Testament. Here are the words of the Righteous Tobit: *And all the streets of Jerusalem shall say, Alleluia, and they shall praise him, saying, Blessed be God Which hath extolled Jerusalem for ever!* (Tobit 13:18).

Thus, if even in the Old Testament – when people had not yet received the full revelation of God; when the mystical veil of the future had been opened only slightly to the righteous; and when sin, grief, and unrighteousness reigned supreme for the majority of people – expectation of the ultimate fate of the world and man inspired in these ancient righteous ones good hopes and joyful feelings, then why now, when the Holy Gospel has been revealed to us, does the picture of the future fate of the world and man seem more sorrowful than joyful to us?

Of course, Christian humility should indicate to us our constant deviation from God's Commandments and awaken the pangs of conscience in us. However, why does the lot of condemned sinners seem to overshadow the picture of Divine Mercy from us, while the radiant Paradise promised to the righteous seems less like our inheritance than something alien?

This, of course, is because in our hearts we feel ourselves to be more on the left-hand side of the coming judgment of the human race than on the right. We do not doubt the truthfulness of the Divine words that will be addressed to the righteous, but somehow this bright hope for Christ's mercy to our souls is less clearly imprinted on them than the rebuke of the Eternal Judge directed to condemned sinners.

This is why people, even believers, try to avoid talk of God's Judgment and

even of the end of our mortal lives.

Alas! Humble-mindedness is not the cause, but rather a sort of desolate detachment of our hearts and our entire lives from the Mercy of Christ and His Providence.

We picture Christ in times long past and rarely take to heart His constant battle with our unseen enemy, that battle to which Scripture constantly calls us, reproaching us for our lazy part in the battle, while the Apostles called everyone to struggle against sin: *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin* (Hebrews 12:4).

If we did strive, at least gradually, to make the constant struggle against sin the main task of our lives, then our picture of the Dread Judgment of Christ would not lead us to despondency; but, on the contrary, it would infuse our souls with the good cheer experienced by the soul of a young warrior preparing for battle or awaiting decision from his commander regarding promotions for his regiment.

Alongside this, the lure of the world would also not seem as enticing and beautiful to us; but, on the contrary, such thoughts would provoke disgust in us, so that we could cry out to God with heartfelt zeal: *Turn Thy face away from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities; and, further, Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit with me* (Psalm 50:9-10).

This prayerful entreaty passes by people's ears and eyes, as well as by their conscience, which gradually hardens, finally reaching a total incapacity for repentance and contrition, thereby depriving them of hope for salvation.

In this sense, it is said that there is no repentance in Hades. This is not because the Righteous Judge does not want to hear the repentant cry of sinners, but because the souls of sinners that have been hardened to the end have lost the feeling of repentance.

May the Lord save us from such a condition!

Of course, the latter condition does not overtake the soul immediately, but gradually, increasingly tying it into moral loops and knots until it ties the so-called dead [i.e., vertical] loop, which cannot be untied, since the soul bound by it no longer wishes to free itself; its suffering from the sins it has committed only multiply its frustration, anger, and murmuring.

Thus, while it is not too late, while the soul feels contrition at least some of the time, may God save us from ill-tempered stubbornness and false shame, which the mindless use to reject the Lord's call to repentance, for this call will sound ever more weakly in our hearts until it grows completely silent! May the Lord keep us from such hardheartedness, as the Church sings during the services of the Lord's Passion, horrified at a similar manifestation among Christ's enemies during His Most-Pure Passion!

