

For most of the liturgical year we are either celebrating the great feasts of the year, such as Christmas and Easter, or the seasons to prepare us for them such as Advent of Lent, or we are celebrating the liturgical season of Ordinary Time. Ordinary Time is the season to reflect on the works and teachings of Jesus. Today we conclude the liturgical year with the thirty fourth Sunday of the season of Ordinary Time celebrated under the name of the Solemnity of Christ the King.

This day marks the last week of the liturgical year and challenges us to reflect on, not only the end of the liturgical year, but the end of our lives and the end of the world as we know it.

At every Sunday Mass we pray the Apostles Creed together. This prayer contains the statements of our faith and is divided into three sections, each pointing to our Trinitarian God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

At Mass we pray this prayer as a ritual prayer. We recite it together in unison as a community of faith, not necessarily thinking of the profound meaning of the content of this prayer, but praying it together as a sign of our solidarity in faith with each other and with Christ and his Church.

Listen carefully now to the words of this prayer, let them penetrate to the depths of your heart:

I believe in God, The Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord, He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Today as we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King, I would like us to focus on the profession of our faith pertaining to Jesus, our Lord, our Saviour, our King. In particular, I would like us to focus on the statement, "He will come to judge the living and the dead." What does this statement mean to you? What does Scripture and the Church teach us about this statement?



In our first reading today, we hear from the prophet Ezekiel, and he speaks to us of God both with the familiar image of a Good Shepherd but also as a judge. We hear the word of God through his prophet Ezekiel, "I shall judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats."

In our Gospel we hear again about a judgement of God from the evangelist Matthew who tells us, "All nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." Our Church teaches that when "Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead" there will be two judgements, a particular judgement and a general judgement.

The individual judgment of each person at death will be made by Jesus Christ. Right after death the eternal destiny of each separate soul is decided by the just judgment of God. Those souls leaving the body in the state of grace, but in need of purification, are cleansed in purgatory. Souls that are perfectly pure are at once admitted to heaven. Those who depart in actual mortal sin are at once sent to hell, to eternal punishment, whose intensity depends on the gravity of their sin.

The biblical evidence for the particular judgment is clearly implied in Sacred Scripture. In the gospel of the rich man and the poor man Lazarus, Jesus showed each as receiving their respective reward and punishment immediately after death. To the penitent thief on the cross at Calvary, Jesus promised that his soul, instantly on leaving the body, would be heaven: "This day, you will be with me in Paradise".

Few truths are more frequently or more clearly proclaimed in the Scriptures than the fact of a general judgment. The Old Testament prophets refer to this judgment in speaking of "The Day of the Lord", when all nations will be summoned to be judged by the Lord of all.

In the New Testament, the Second Coming of Christ as Judge of the World, is woven into the whole mystery of salvation. The Lord's prediction of the last day covers the whole twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Chapter twenty-five opens with two parables. The first about the five foolish and the five wise virgins, and the second, which we heard last week, about the master who goes on a journey and leaves three of his servants with varying amounts of money to put to good use in his absence. In the first parable, the five foolish virgins fail to bring enough oil for their lamps to meet the bridegroom. By the time they reach the marriage feast "the door was shut." The bridegroom tells them, "I do not know you." Then Christ's warning to all of us: "Watch, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour".

In the second parable when the master returns from his journey he demands an account of his servants. The servants who received five and two talents respectively wisely put their talents to good use and earned another five and two talents each as a result. They were both praised by the master and handsomely rewarded. But the man who had been given only one talent buried it and apologized for his neglect. He was cast out into the exterior darkness. Where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Today we hear in the gospel, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory." Then shall the King say to them on His right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by 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 something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me

clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

This teaching of Jesus of the general judgment closes with one of the single most important verses in the bible. Jesus tells us that those who failed in charity “shall go away into eternal punishment,” but those who had selflessly met the needs of others, shall go away “into eternal life”.

These are statements of our faith. They are not meant to cause us anxiety about death, but to instill in us the importance of living each moment of our lives in loving God as best we can, and in loving each other, for the sake of God, as best we can.