

The Second Coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead are closely connected with the coming judgement. All men will stand before the dread judgement seat of Christ.

In the Creed we confess that Christ will come with glory “to judge the living and the dead.”

This conviction constitutes the central teaching of the Church.

In Holy Scripture a great deal is said about the coming judgement, which is a starting-point for eternal life and eternal Hell. Christ’s parables about the Ten Virgins, the tares and the weddings are well known.

Christ assured the people that He Himself would judge the people in the age to come.

“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgement to the Son” (Jn. 5:22).

He became man, suffered, was crucified, rose again and was taken up. He, then, will be the judge of men.

In Acts it is written: “And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42).

Also the Apostle Paul preached the same teaching on Mars Hill, when he said:

“He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

The connection of the Second Coming of Christ with the throne shows both the majesty of God and Christ’s authority to judge men, but also men’s fear in the face of the judgement and the judge. Christ used this image when he said that when he comes with the angels,

“He will sit on the throne of His glory” (Matt. 25:31).

The meaning of the throne, which suggests the imperial throne and the tribunal, has been closely linked with Christ’s judgement of the living and the dead, and we find it in many passages in the epistles of the Apostle Paul. Referring to the fact that we are all suppliants, servants of Christ, and we should not judge others, he affirms:

“For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ” (Rom. 14:10).

The Christians of Rome, to whom this is said, had knowledge and experience of what the emperor’s and the judge’s throne meant. He also says the same thing to the Christians of Corinth:

“For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

Christ's parable of the wedding is well known. When the king came to the place where those invited to his son's wedding were gathered, he saw one person who was not wearing a wedding garment. Then he reprimanded him, saying,

"Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?"

He commanded that he be bound hand and foot and cast into the outer fire, where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:1-14).

According to the interpretation of this parable by St. Gregory Palamas, the wedding refers to the Second Coming of Christ and to the Kingdom of Heaven.

The entry of the King, who is God, is "the manifestation at the time of the future judgement". The garment of the spiritual wedding, which was indispensable for those invited, was virtue. And when the Holy Fathers speak of virtue, they mean the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and not a superficial human virtue.

He who lacks the garment of virtues will not only be unworthy of the Kingdom of God, but also will be punished. Not only the soul but also the body will prove to be unworthy of that bridal chamber, if it has not lived in self-control, purity and sobriety.

The punishment for not having a wedding garment is connected with his removal from the dwelling-place of those rejoicing and from close association with them. It is basically a question of separation from God and not sharing in His grace.

The fact that his hands and feet are bound, by order of the King, refers to a person's constriction by successions of sins which occur in this life. The unbearable pain and great suffering which the person feels when he commits them in this life will continue in the next life as well. The fact that he is cast into the outer fire indicates

"his having become far from God because he did not do deeds of light here".

Inasmuch as he did not practice deeds of light in this life, in that day he cannot participate in the light. Saying that he is separated from God means this. The darkness into which he will be taken is synonymous with the inextinguishable fire, the unsleeping worms, the weeping and gnashing of teeth. All these things point to

"the impending unbearable sufferings touching both soul and body"

and the mournful cries of useless and perpetual regret. That is to say, they will repent of the deeds they have done, but it will never be possible to be comforted, for the repentance to be brought to an end.

St. Symeon the New Theologian, interpreting this passage, says that Christ is referring to something deeper and more essential. The fact that He reproaches the sinners, since He was hungry and they did not feed Him or He was thirsty and they did not give Him water to drink, means that He was hungry for their salvation and they did not measure up to it.

Through his creation by God, man is in His image and likeness, and through his coming into the Church, which is the Body of Christ, he is closely connected with God. Likewise through the sacraments he becomes a member of the Body of Christ. So when he does not live in accordance with God's commandments, it is as if he was letting Christ be hungry and thirsty.

St. Symeon says that Christ was hungry for man's conversion and repentance and man did not satisfy His hunger. He thirsted for man's salvation, and man did not give Him a chance to taste it. He was bare of virtuous deeds, and man did not clothe Him with them, for when the Christian as a member of Christ lacks these virtues, He is as if left naked with His limbs exposed. He was shut into the narrow, filthy, dark prison of man's heart, and man did not wish to visit Him or bring Him out into the light. The Christian knew that it was because of his indolence and inactivity that Christ was ill, and he did not help Him by good works and acts.

Christ really desires the salvation of man, whom He created, and through love He has endured many sufferings for his salvation. At the same time, through holy Baptism the Christian is a member of His body. And when he does not measure up to this desire of Christ and remains in the darkness of sin, then he condemns himself.

Through holy Baptism the grace of God remains in the depth of the heart of man. But divine grace is hidden by the sins which we commit after our entry into the Church. Thus Christ is as if imprisoned in the heart. Man's Hell will be precisely this.

The coming judgement is not a typical legal process but is Christ's expression and revelation of man's inner spiritual condition. He who is reborn of the Holy Spirit will then appear clearly to all men; his kinship with Christ, who will shine radiantly, will be revealed.

And he who is not reborn, and especially he who has a dark and unenlightened nous, will be revealed to all men, because he will have no share in God. Just as the appearing of the sun throws light on all things, so also the coming of the true Sun of Righteousness will be a real revelation of the inner dispositions and desires of men.

Thus at His appearance Christ will reveal men's way of life, their whole being, what is at the depth of their heart. This revelation is eternal life and eternal hell, because the first is participation in God, and the second is connected with non-participation and non-communion with God.

St. Symeon the New Theologian asks God to give him His grace already now, as a pledge, that he may enjoy it in the coming life:

“Grant me henceforth to serve Thee, my Saviour, and to receive Thy Divine Spirit, pledge of Thy kingdom and hence to enjoy Thy banquet, Thy glory, that I may see Thee, O my God, unto the ages of ages”.

This is a concern of all the saints. They do not fear death, but they fear what will happen after that, especially at the Second Coming of Christ. They are not so much concerned about the time of their death as about the way in which they will depart, that is to say what will be their condition at that hour, for that will have eternal consequences.

Many of us have the illusion that we are holy, that we are full of virtues, since there are also many flatterers who cultivate this self-esteem. But then all will be revealed, and all men will see our nakedness.

There are many things in this life which conceal the blindness of our hearts and the nakedness of our souls. Many times this happens through the wisdom and knowledge of the world. We think that we are something, while essentially we are dead to God, we have nothing good. Then all will be revealed. St. Symeon the New Theologian asks:

“Where will be the pretended prudence of those who are honored for their knowledge and wisdom of the world? Where our presumption and illusion that we are something, though we are nothing?”

So, blessed is the man who lives in repentance and sees himself “lower than every creature”, because “then he will stand at His right hand in glorious apparel”. Only those adorned with the grace of God will stand at the right hand of the throne of God.

When St. Symeon speaks of clothes and nakedness, he does not mean only the existence or lack of virtues, but the Holy Spirit, the very light of God. Then the night will become as light as the day; every house and cave, even heaven and earth will be removed, and thus all who have not put on Christ, that is to say

“those who have not received the light... and previously been in it and become light”,

then will appear naked and will be filled with much shame. Every act, bad or good, every thought, every memory that has arisen in us from our very birth till our last breath will appear. All will be revealed before men.

The Judgement will be by the commandments of God, which will test the faithful and unfaithful. In reality the unfaithful will be self-condemning for the deeds which they have done. Then a man will not get help from human wisdom and knowledge nor from eloquence of words nor from money and earthly possessions.

In conclusion let me say that Christ will come into the world again, and this will be His Second Coming. The whole creation will be renewed, the dead will rise again, all who are alive then will

be changed, and the judgement of men will follow. All these things are truths which will happen in any case, but we do not know the day and hour when they will happen.

Therefore Christ exhorts us always to be ready. Just as happened with Noah's flood, where men were "eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage"

until Noah entered the ark and then all understood that the flood had come, the same will happen at the appearing of the Son of Man. So Christ says: "Watch, therefore, for you do not know at what hour your Lord is coming" (Matt. 24:37-42).

And at the end of the Parable of the Ten Virgins Christ said: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming".