

Love and Judgment

Two points attract the attention in what the gospels say about judgment: That we will be judged according to how much we have loved; second, we are judged as to how much we have made use of our gifts because they (the gifts) are supposed to be poured forth for others so they (the gifts) become a sacrifice to God; and because we are to be enriched and beautified with what the Lord has bestowed upon us and that we do not bury our gifts like lazy slaves do. And as far as the discourse in which the judgment is mentioned, one would be surprised that the Lord does not ask us whether we have been praying and fasting or not, and He does not mention the ten commandments but He asks whether we have loved or not. And that is not because the Gospel ignores the Mosaic Law, but because the Gospel finds that love, as the completion of the Ten Commandments, is the revelation of a vision of God in the heart and our vision of Man in God. And He who has not that is in need of training in the commandment of love and in the Law. The New Testament does not cancel Moses. It transcends him. It takes us to the Deep. And wants us to come out of the Deep in order to fast. And before Lent the Church wants us to be in the more comprehensive vision that God is in the "other" and that it would be impossible for you to see God's face unless you see it in a wounded human face or a famished body or a person who is victim of solitude. We have no contact with God except in that; not through people but in people. And when Jesus says: "No one comes to the Father but by me", he does not only consider himself the mediator between humans and their Maker but expands the meaning of what he said to mean that no one comes to God unless he finds Him in the "other" human being.

Getting ready for Lent, we read in Church the passage of "the Judgment Day" from the Gospel of Mathew; it starts with "I was hungry and you fed me" and then it mentions "I was hungry and you did not feed me". At the end of the journey of an individual human being, God judges him according to his heart, meaning that God is the one who judges what is in the inside of Man and He being the Truth uncovers the falsehood of Man. You cannot "joke" with God. You can play "the crafty one" and "the smart one" here and there and justify what you do and play back and forth in between the grounds of the Divine and of the Devil, and both are in you, but you cannot bluff God neither today nor later, and you cannot, if you were a great saint, aggrandize yourself before Him because it is then that your

holiness would break down and you would become a midget like you were before your endeavor to holiness.

What's important in the idea of judgment is that all people are "small" in the presence of the Lord, stripped from all that can cover their nakedness and without any "passport" to admit them to heaven. But the Lord of Heaven extends His hand from inside to hold them in His mercy. It is not that we die spiritually if we brag about our virtue but that "our righteousness before him is like a menstrual cloth" as Isaiah says. God always reads us and he reads us as 'ugly' but He cleanses us with the waters of His affection because He delights in that, then He bestows upon us the habit of light so we can get in to the Light.

The Judgment on the Last Day is clearly mentioned in the four gospels and there is no way we can undo the picture of the God the judge. And God judges his people and give commands that should be carried out. All this is linked to the picture of God as "the awesome", "the punisher" and "the rewarder". And God judges humanity with fire on the day of the Lord" as Isaiah says. That's the picture of the last day. Yet there is before us another picture that only the gospel of John mentions which is that the judgment takes place here and now. "And this is the condemnation: that Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil". John 3:19. The judgment is taking place in the human heart apart from prosecutionary procedures. The world has been condemned because it killed Christ. The world scandalized itself with that death. And the ultimate meaning for the "crime" that humanity committed on Golgotha is that it insisted to destroy what is Divine in it; that is to destroy love. Except that Jesus gave his death a meaning of regeneration for Man and that was realized in His resurrection. And with regard to his resurrection you get to belong to Him or to reject Him.

And if the judgment, in its nature and profundity, is in progress in the human soul in the present time, and if it is the true uncovering of the soul in the presence of God and His Truthfulness, then Hell would only be the "burning" of the soul in its desires. There is no fire except the one in you and there is no heaven except the one in you. In the same way, you can be a heaven for others or a hell.

Isaac of Syria said: "All those in hell are scourged by the Divine Love As such Love works in two different ways. It is pain in those who are condemned and it is joy in those who are saved". God himself is a light to some and a fire to the others. And He alone is the dwelling place if you abide in Him and find peace in Him and you would be the dwelling place when He lives in you as John the beloved says.

But the Lord of the Gospel said something greater: "I was hungry and you gave me to eat". Here the Christ that Mathew believes is the Son of God, has identified himself with the poor. And also with those in prison and those who are sick. Jesus' intimate companions are the wretched of the earth. Since their own brothers

disowned them, they became Jesus' own brothers. Jesus confines you when he makes of your closeness to the wretched a condition for your closeness to Him. What hurts Jesus is that those needy ones become estranged.

Man's ability to adjust to miserable conditions is amazing. One would eat very little and live in a shack and bear illness because he cannot afford to pay for a visit to the doctor. What is worse than such a need is when the arrogant rich uses the misery of others taking advantage of it to reinforce his status of money and power. That hurts Jesus much more. With great tenderness Jesus calls those "my little brothers".

But in the Gospel reading of the Judgment He goes beyond that and says that "they are He". "I was hungry". He never referred to anything as being "He" except here. He said something close to that: "The words that I speak to you are light and life". But He did not say that these words are He even though He meant it. And of the Eucharist He said: "This is my body" but He did not say It is He though He meant it. But in this passage He says that the poor is He.

There remains a legal question of the school of thought of the Nineteenth Century: What is the use of taking care of the poor. What is important is to get rid of poverty and need. Here I do not argue the means of eradicating poverty like through revolutions or dealing with political economics. My concern is to love now with the means I have and in my surroundings because the poor, my beloved, they are more important than what I give them and I am more important for them than what I offer.

Yet what is given is little because relatively love is always little. And when I do not give the needy anything I am the one who is not loved. In that sense you do not do charity to the poor, they do charity to you when they receive from you. You offer them a service in that they are your master. It is best not to let your left hand know what your right hand does, because you would not have felt that the needy have given you an opportunity to love and in that they have done charity unto you. And St. John Chrysostom felt that when he called giving to the poor "the altar of the brother" thus elevating the deed above the altar of the church though he did not give reasons for his preference. But the Gospel teaches us that truthful giving is the crux of the truthfulness of our relationship with God. And I dare to say that he who truly loves the brethren from the heart will not be condemned. And that is like what the martyrs did; they have attained perfect love and so, according to our Teachers, they will not be condemned.

It hurts me to see that stinginess is rampant in the days of plenty as it is in the days of lack. It is quite shocking to me to notice that religion (Christianity) to most people is just words and to only a few "The Word has become flesh" and according to what we are saying, He has become a gift so we can become Christ to each other

and so if we fast from eating we understand that it is an exercise which makes us run to those whom we are bound to make them our Kings (the poor).