

What the Judgment Is

By Bishop George Khodr

In my youth, when I was a student at the Fransiscan mission school, the monks used to tell us that there is a personal judgment at one's death, and a universal judgment on the Last Day. At that time I used to be involved in studying Orthodox doctrine in which I never found the above duality. And I used to say to myself: "Sufficient for me is the dread of the universal judgment".

Then I came to know that the Eastern Church says that after death you realize what your position with God is and that you wait for the reward if you have not been shackled with many sins and that would be a beginning of joy if not the ultimate one. And if you are loaded with many sins, you would be waiting for the last punishment and there is quite a penalty in that.

Then at my old age I considered the idea of "personal judgment" but I did not adopt the expression used because my Church does not use it. I got convinced not very long ago that the moment of death is a moment of standing before the Creator and that that encounter is one full of awe and fear; since you are in front of God with the load of your sins and as such in disharmony with the nature of the Lord. And you feel that that encounter dictates your eternal destiny though God has engulfed the encounter with mercy from its beginning to its end.

It does not seem to me that there are legal proceedings against you that would decide your eternal destiny. And, for God to be depicted as a court is an image of a juridical nature though our holy books mention it. And these books tell the story of Man and God in principle but the major story is of the encounter which takes place right after you leave this earth. The image I use is that of Christ approaching you while you are in the coffin, and whispering in your ear, He reproves you. Maybe Jesus would be tender in that whisper, but in His obedience to His Father, He does not find sin easy since it wounds the compassions the Father has for you. You did nothing to balsam the wounds of the Father. You remain an enemy due to sin, and the Father remains the One who holds you to His heart; or the Son puts you on His chest, and when the Father sees that, He has compassion on you without neglecting reproving you, since if He does not reprove you, He would be, in a biased way, siding with you and not in line with His own Law.

And through His law you can become better because you cannot flirt with sin and remain close to God. You are close to Him in as much as you shine spiritually because the Lord does not have a clique whom He brings close to Himself and another clique He distances. You, when you are His, become of Him as He sees Himself in you since when you become pure you become His mirror; and the Lord in His nature loves Himself in you and continually asks you whether you have accepted Him or not and He knows that you are His; or that you are not His but

that you are seeking to aggrandize yourself and then dwell in its uppity thus making your pride your dwelling place and as such removing God away to a distant “dwelling place”.

The heart of the matter with God is whether you make Him yours or not. And when you distance Him – and that is what we do when we sin – you distance yourself from true existence in order to make for yourself an existence which deceives you and sets you up in the delusions of this world. It is sin that makes you think that your existence is through your own power and strength and not through the power of the Lord; as such, sin takes you soaring into a deceitful mirage away from God.

The heart of the matter is that you know that you are the guest of the Divine Being who is in you; or else you would be the guest of the illusions you make for yourself in your fear of God. Are you a man of fear or of confidence? Do you feed on yourself and the deceitfulness that is nested in you, or are you thrown in the bosom of the Father forgetting your pleasures and luxuries so that you feel that you have become a son who, while still in this world, dwells in the Kingdom of God that descends on you in the love and tenderness of the Father?

His tenderness, if you believe in Him, would draw your eyes to His eyes thus making you know that you exist through His gaze on you. And this gaze, if you “catch” it, makes you examine your heart as the Orthodox say, or makes you examine your conscience as the Latin say. Blessed are you if you see God in your heart and you see Him stirring the throbbings of the Spirit in you, throbbings that stay in you after the body is extinguished.

If some insist on considering a personal judgment, I would say that, if we are watchful, each moment of our life is a personal judgment in the sense that our spiritual consciousness makes us continually standing in the presence of God; as such we see that our sin strikes us and that distancing ourselves from Him is death itself. Every sin is a death; and I would say that the death coming from sin is the “death of God” (I am only borrowing from Nietzsche the expression). How ugly is the one who kills God in him not knowing that with that he effaces himself from real existence and renders the fire of hell dwelling in his soul even ahead of the time when, unless he repents, the demons would take him to themselves.

And repentance for the sinner means that he discovers that his ways are sinful and that all his opinion of God is wrong because he used to delude himself that sin is not sinful and that it is necessary for life and perhaps he was seeking to keep God in his heart or to go further, he reckoned that he can keep for himself a being (that is his own) severed from the Divine Being.

Our story of our association with sin is very terrible because it is founded on a great fallacy which is that you think you are able to live without God or at least

you think that you would delay your encounter with Him and as such you have no idea about the dread of death and what that entails.

The sinner is not only perverse in his behavior. He is also perverse in his thinking in the sense that he has got fallacious thinking. Repentance is that you take off from yourself such wrong thinking so that you can have the mind that was in Christ Jesus as Paul said or, if your religion is not that of Paul, the mind which resembles that.

Lord save us from sin and draw us closer to your Face so we can have life.