

LESSON THIRTY-SEVENTH.

ON THE LAST JUDGMENT AND THE RESURRECTION, HELL, PURGATORY, AND HEAVEN.

408 Q. When will Christ judge us?

A. Christ will judge us immediately after our death, and on the last day.

“Immediately.” In the very room and on the very spot where we die, we shall be judged in an instant, and even before those around us are sure that we are really dead. When we have a trial or judgment in one of our courts, we see the judge listening, the lawyers defending or trying to condemn, and the witnesses for or against the person accused. We are in the habit of imagining something of the same kind to take place in the judgment of God. We see Almighty God seated on His throne; our angel and patron saint giving their testimony about us—good or bad—and then we hear the Judge pronounce sentence. This takes place, but not in the way we imagine, for God needs no witnesses: He knows all. An example will probably make you understand better what really takes place. If you are walking over a very muddy road on a dark night, you cannot see the spattered condition of your clothing; but if you come suddenly into a strong light you will see at a glance the state in which you are. In the same way the soul during our earthly life does not see its own condition; but when it comes into the bright light of God’s presence, it sees in an instant its own state and knows what its sentence will be. It goes immediately to its reward or punishment. This judgment at the moment of our death will settle our fate forever. The general judgment will not change, but only repeat, the sentence before the whole world. Oh, how we should prepare for that awful moment! See that

poor sick man slowly breathing away his life. All his friends are kneeling around him praying; now he becomes unconscious; now the death-rattle sounds in his throat; now the eyes are fixed and glassy. A few minutes more and that poor soul will stand in the awful presence of God, to give an account of that man's whole life—of every thought, word, and deed. All he has done on earth will be spread out before him like a great picture. He will, towards the end of his life, have altogether forgotten perhaps what he thought, said, or did on a certain day and hour—the place he was in and the sin committed, etc.; but at that moment of judgment he will remember all. How he will wish he had been good! How, then, can we be so careless now about a matter of such importance, when we are absolutely certain that we too shall be judged, and how soon we know not. When you are about to be examined on what you have learned in school or instructions in six months or a year, how anxious you are in making the necessary preparation, and how you fear you might not pass, but be kept back for a while! How delighted you would be to hear that a very dear friend, and one who knew you well, was to be your examiner! Prepare in the same way for the examination you have to stand at the end of your life. Every day you can make a preparation by examining your conscience on the sins you have committed; by making an act of contrition for them, and resolving to avoid them for the future. You should never go to sleep without some preparation for judgment. But above all, try to become better acquainted with your Examiner—Our Lord Jesus Christ; try by your prayers and good works to become His special friend, and when your judgment comes you will be pleased rather than afraid to meet Him.

409 Q. What is the judgment called which we have to undergo immediately after death?

A. The judgment we have to undergo immediately after death is called the Particular Judgment.

“Particular,” because one particular person is judged.

410 Q. What is the judgment called which all men have to undergo on the last day?

A. The judgment which all men have to undergo on the last day is called the General Judgment.

“General,” because every creature gifted with intelligence will be judged on that day—the angels of heaven, the devils of hell, and all men, women, and children that have ever lived upon the earth. The Holy Scripture gives us a terrible account of that awful day (Matt. xxiv., xxv.). On some day—we know not when, it might be to-morrow for all we know—the world will be going on as usual, some going to school, others to business; some seeking pleasure, others suffering pain; some in health, others in sickness, etc. Suddenly they will feel the earth beginning to quake and tremble; they will see the ocean in great fury, and will be terrified at its roar as, surging and foaming, it throws its mighty waves high in air. Then the sun will grow red and begin to darken; a horrid glare will spread over the earth, beginning to burn up. Then, says the Holy Scripture, men will wither away for fear of what is coming; they will call upon the mountains to fall and hide them; they will be rushing here and there, not knowing what to do. Money will be of no value then; dress, wealth, fame, power, learning, and all else will be useless, for at that moment all men will be equal. Then shall be heard the sound of the angel’s great trumpet calling all to judgment. The dead shall come forth from their graves, and the demons rush from hell. Then all shall see our blessed Lord coming in the clouds of heaven in great power and majesty, surrounded by countless angels bearing His shining cross before Him. He will separate the good from the wicked; He will welcome the good to heaven and condemn the wicked to hell. The sins committed shall be made public before all present. Imagine your feelings while you are standing in that great multitude, waiting for the separation of the good from the bad. To which side will you be sent? Our Lord is coming, not with the mild countenance of a saviour, but with the severe look of a judge. As

He draws nearer and nearer to you, you see some of your dear friends, whom you thought good enough upon earth, sent over to the side of the wicked; you see others that you deemed foolish sent with the good, and you become more anxious every instant about the uncertainty of your own fate. You see fathers and mothers sent to opposite sides, brothers and sisters, parents and children, separated forever. Oh, what a terrible moment of suspense! How you will wish you had been better and always lived a friend of God! The side you will be on depends upon what you do now, and you can be on the better side if you wish. Do, then, in your life what you would wish to have done at that terrible moment. Learn to judge yourself frequently. Say this, or something similar, to yourself: "Now I have lived twelve, fifteen, twenty, or more years; if that judgment came to-day, on which side should I be? Probably on the side of the wicked. If then I spend the rest of my life as I have lived in the past, on the last day I shall surely be with the wicked. If my good deeds and bad deeds were counted to-day, which would be more numerous? What, then, must I do? It will not be enough for me simply to be better for the future—I must try also to make amends for the past. If a man wishing to complete a journey on a certain time, by walking a fixed number of miles each day, falls behind a great deal on one day, he must not only walk the usual number of miles the next, but must make up for the distance lost on the previous day. So in our journey through this life we must do our duty each day for the future, and, as far as we can, make up for what we have neglected in the past.

* 411 Q. Why does Christ judge men immediately after death?

A. Christ judges men immediately after death to reward or punish them according to their deeds.

412 Q. What are the rewards or punishments appointed for men's souls after the Particular Judgment?

A. The rewards or punishments appointed for men's

souls after the Particular Judgment are heaven, purgatory, and hell.

413 Q. What is hell?

A. Hell is a state to which the wicked are condemned, and in which they are deprived of the sight of God for all eternity, and are in dreadful torments.

“Deprived of the sight of God.” This is called the *pain of loss*, while the other sufferings the damned endure are called the *pain of sense*—that is, of the senses. The pain of loss causes the unfortunate souls more torment than all their other sufferings; for as we are created for God alone, the loss of Him—our last end—is the most dreadful evil that can befall us. This the damned realize, and know that their souls will be tortured by a perpetual yearning never to be satisfied. This is aggravated by the thought of how easily they might have been saved, and how foolishly they threw away their happiness and lost all for some miserable pleasure or gratification, so quickly ended.

Besides this remorse, they suffer most frightful torments in all their senses. The worst sufferings you could imagine would not be as bad as the sufferings of the damned really are; for hell must be the opposite of heaven, and since we cannot, as St. Paul says, imagine the happiness of heaven, neither can we imagine the misery of hell. Sometimes you will find frightful descriptions of hell in religious books, that tell of the horrible sights, awful sounds, disgusting stench, and excruciating pains the lost souls endure. Now, all these descriptions are given rather to make people think of the torments of hell than as an accurate account of them. No matter how terrible the description may be, it is never as bad as the reality. We know that the damned are continually tormented in all their senses, but just in what way we do not know. We know that there is fire in hell, but it is entirely different from our fire; it neither gives light nor consumes what it burns, and it causes greater pain than the fire of earth, for it affects both body and soul. We know that the damned will never see God,

and there will never be an end to their torments. Now, all this is contained in the following: Hell is the absence of everything good and the presence of everything evil, and it will last forever. Now, a priest coming out to preach on hell would not say to the people: "Hell is the absence of everything good and the presence of everything evil, and it will last forever," and then step down from the altar and say no more. He must give a fuller explanation to those who are unable to think for themselves. He must point out some of the evils present in hell and some of the good things absent, and thus teach the people how to meditate on these dreadful truths. If, then, you bear in mind that there is nothing good in hell and it will last forever, and often think of these two points, you will have a holy fear of the woful place and a deep sorrow for your sins which expose you to the danger of suffering its torments.

It should be enough, therefore, for you to remember: there is nothing good in hell, and it will last forever. Think of anything good you please and it cannot be found in hell. Is light good? Yes. Then it is not in hell. Is hope good? Yes. Then it is not in hell. Is true friendship good? Yes. Then it is not in hell. There the damned hate one another. There the poor sufferers curse forever those who led them into sin. Hence, persons should try to bring back to a good life every one they may have led into sin or scandalized by bad example.

* 414 Q. What is purgatory?

A. Purgatory is the state in which those suffer for a time who die guilty of venial sins, or without having satisfied for the punishment due to their sins.

"Punishment"—that is, temporal punishment, already explained to you. After the general judgment there will be heaven and hell, but no purgatory, for there will be no men living or dying upon the earth in its present condition to go there. All will be dead and judged and sent to their final abodes. Those in purgatory are the friends of God; and knowing Him as they do now, they would not go into His holy pres

ence with the slightest stain upon their souls; still they are anxious for their purgatory to be ended that they may be with God. They suffer, we are told, the same pains of sense as the damned; but they suffer willingly, for they know that it is making them more pleasing to God, and that one day it will all be over and He will receive them into heaven. Their salvation is sure, and that thought makes them happy. If, therefore, you believe any of your friends are in purgatory, you should help them all you can, and try by your prayers and good works to shorten their time of suffering. They will help you—though they cannot help themselves—by their prayers. And oh, when they are admitted into heaven, how they will pray for those that have helped them out of purgatory! If you do this great charity, God will, when you die, put it in some good person's heart to pray for you while you suffer in purgatory. There must be a purgatory, for one who dies with the slightest stain of sin upon his soul cannot enter heaven, and yet God would not send him to hell for so small a sin. But why does God punish those He loves? Why does He not forgive everything? He punishes because He is infinitely just and true. He warned them that if they did certain things they would be punished; and they did them, and God must keep His promise. Moreover He is just, and must give to every one exactly what he deserves.

* 415 Can the faithful on earth help the souls in purgatory?

A. The faithful on earth can help the souls in purgatory by their prayers, fasts, almsdeeds; by indulgences, and by having Masses said for them.

* 416 Q. If every one is judged immediately after death, what need is there of a general judgment?

A. There is need of a general judgment, though every one is judged immediately after death, that the providence of God, which, on earth, often permits the good to suffer and the wicked to prosper, may in the end appear just before all men.

“ Providence of God.” Sometimes here on earth we see a good man always in want, out of employment, sickly, unsuccessful in all his undertakings, while his neighbor, who is a very bad man, is wealthy and prosperous, and seems to have every pleasure. Why this is so we cannot understand now, but God’s reason for it will be made known to us on the day of judgment. Sometimes the wicked do good actions here on earth—help the poor, or contribute to some charity, for instance; and as God on account of their wickedness cannot reward them in the next world, He rewards them chiefly in this world by temporal goods and pleasures. For all their good deeds they get their reward in this world, and for the evil their punishment in the next. The good man who suffers gets all his reward in the next world, and even his sufferings here atone partly for the evil he has done.

A second reason for a general judgment is to show the crimes of sinners and the justice of their punishment; also that the saints may have all their good works made known before the world and receive the glory they deserve. On earth these saints were sometimes considered fools and treated as criminals, falsely accused, etc., and now the whole truth will stand out before the world. But above all, the general judgment is for the honor and glory of Our Lord. At His first coming into the world He was poor and weak; many would not believe Him the Son of God, and insulted Him as an impostor. He was falsely accused, treated shamefully, and was put to death, many believing Him guilty of some crime. Now He will appear before all as He really is—their Lord and Master, their Creator and Judge. How they will tremble to look upon Him Whom they have crucified! How all those who have denied Him, blasphemed Him, persecuted His Church, and the like, will fear when they see Him there as Judge! How they will realize the terrible mistake worldlings made!

417 Q. Will our bodies share in the reward or punishment of our souls?

A. Our bodies will share in the reward or punishment of our souls, because through the resurrection they will again be united to them.

* 418 Q. In what state will the bodies of the just rise?

A. The bodies of the just will rise glorious and immortal.

We honor the dead body and treat it with great respect because it was the dwelling-place of the soul and was often nourished with the sacraments; also because it will rise in glory and be united with the soul in the presence of God forever. For these reasons we use incense and holy water when the body is to be buried, and even bless the ground in which it is laid. "Faithful departed" means all those who died in a state of grace and who are in heaven or purgatory. They may be in purgatory, and so we pray for them. We pray that they may "rest in peace"—that is be in heaven, where they will have no sufferings.

* 419 Q. Will the bodies of the damned also rise?

A. The bodies of the damned will also rise, but they will be condemned to eternal punishment.

420 Q. What is heaven?

A. Heaven is the state of everlasting life in which we see God face to face, are made like unto Him in glory, and enjoy eternal happiness.

The most delightful place we could possibly imagine as heaven would not be near what it really is. Everything that is good is there and forever, and we shall never tire of its joys. All the pleasures and beauties of earth are as nothing compared with heaven; and though we think we can imagine its beauty and happiness now, we shall see how far we have been from the real truth if ever we reach this heavenly home. "God face to face"—that is, as He is. We shall not see Him with the eyes of the body, but of the soul. That we may see

with our natural eyes, two things are necessary: first, an object to look at, and secondly, light to see it. Now, to see God in heaven we need a special light, which is called the "light of glory." God Himself gives us this light and thus enables us to see Him as He is. This beautiful vision of God in heaven is called the "beatific vision," and thus our whole life in heaven—our joy and happiness—consists in the enjoyment of the beatific vision.

* 421 What words should we bear always in mind?

A. We should bear always in mind these words of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul, or what exchange shall a man give for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels: and then will He render to every man according to his works."

What does it benefit the poor creatures in hell to have been rich, or beautiful, or learned, or powerful? If they had been good, it was all that was necessary to escape all their sufferings. Is there anything on earth that they would not give to be released? Why, then, did they sell their souls for so little while on earth? The present is the only time you have to merit heaven and escape hell. The past you cannot recall, and of the future you are not sure. Then use the present well and decide daily whether you wish to be in heaven or in hell.

NOTE.—Wherever in the foregoing pages explanations have been omitted after certain questions or answers it is because the matter they contain has been explained in some preceding question, or is to be explained in some following question, or is clear enough in itself without explanation. The explanations of such questions or answers can be easily found by referring to the index.