

Harsh or Rash Judgment?

Daily Gospel / Liturgical Cycle C

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Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Matthew 11: 20-24.

Jesus began to reproach the towns where most of his mighty deeds had been done, since they had not repented. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And as for you, Capernaum: Will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to the netherworld. For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

Matthew 11: 20-24.

Introductory Prayer:

God our Father, you are my shelter against the burning heat of the day and the storms of life. I know and I believe that I can count on your help when I stumble, that you will catch me when I fall and guide my steps firmly in faith toward the promise of eternal life.

Petition:

Jesus, help me to seek you with a sincere heart.

1. Blessings and Responsibility:

Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more (cf. Luke 12:48). With every blessing comes a degree of responsibility. The mighty deeds worked in these towns were not seen by everyone in Israel, let alone the world. Therefore, those who do see them have a greater responsibility than those who do not. Jesus reproaches them so as to awaken them from their stupor. Since the miracles have not moved them to a deeper faith, then perhaps the reminder that they will one day be answerable to God might. Do I need a similar fear of punishment to drive me from my sins, or am I more focused on pleasing God in the details of my life?

2. The Goal is Repentance:

The goal of all of Jesus' signs is to bring about a change of heart. Even in the Old Testament, the signs and wonders worked by Yahweh were intended to elicit a response of faith and trust from Israel. The danger for Israel, as for Jesus' listeners and for us, is to become accustomed to these signs and to demand more signs, thus losing sight of their purpose – a redirection of our life from self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness. Like Herod, we want to be dazzled by Jesus' miracles, but we do not want to change our lives. Jesus never works a miracle in order to impress, but only to convert a heart back to God or to bring it into deeper union with God.

3. Reward or Punishment:

We can learn a great deal from this strong phrase: Firstly, that we will be judged for our actions and our omissions; secondly, that judgment from God has varying degrees. Since God sees and knows perfectly, the judgment will be objective; those who knew less will be judged less strictly. In other words, Sodom, Tyre and Sidon will indeed be judged, but according to natural law and not according to Christian faith, which they did not have access to at the time. Finally, but not exhaustively, we can deduce that there will be different gradations in heaven and hell according to how well our actions corresponded to what we knew to be true and good. This knowledge should stimulate us to be more generous with God and more centered on things that are above. Our Lord will handsomely reward our smallest good deed.

Conversation with Christ:

Dear Lord, open my eyes to the constant workings of your grace in my life. Never allow me to become complacent or to undervalue the tremendous gift of faith in my life. Thank you for reminding me of the importance of my daily decisions. Mother Most Pure, make my heart only for Jesus.

Resolution:

Today I will read nos. 1783-1785 from the Catechism of the Catholic Church.