

Homily: 33rd Sunday: Cycle C: 2016: Mal 3: 19-20; Ps. 98; 2 Thes 3: 7-12; Lk 21: 5-19

“By Your Perseverance You will Secure Your Lives”

If you recall last week I preached about the reality of Purgatory and the need to pray for those who have died who may be there being purified of their sins and the spiritual damage they caused to themselves and others. This week I want to focus on the other parts of the Last Things, namely death, judgment, Heaven and Hell.

1. **If the Lord called you or me out of this life today, would we be ready?** I think all of us initially shutter at the thought, even Pope Benedict mentions that in his new interview book. But if we are honestly striving to grow in holiness, we are on the right path. This involves the normal daily events of the spiritual life: *prayer, acts of penance, embracing our daily crosses with generosity, carrying out our daily duties with love and patience, receiving the Sacraments of the Church with faith and devotion, and doing acts of mercy and love for our neighbor with our time, talent, and treasure.* When we come to the end of our lives we will be judged on our love or lack there of. What does the Catechism say about this? *Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of Heaven: either through a purification, (i.e., **Purgatory** if our souls are not perfectly purified of sin in this life); or immediately into **Heaven** (if we die a saint); or into immediate and everlasting damnation, **Hell** (if there is unrepented mortal sin on our souls at the time of death). In the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love (St. John of the Cross in the CCC, 1022).*
2. **It’s important to keep in mind that this life is a temporary pilgrimage - but with eternal consequences.** If we are not careful we can fall into the trap of the old true saying: *familiarity can breed contempt.* We can forget our eternal destiny or even stop believing in it. Two quick stories to illustrate this: The **first** one was from a powerful scene in the classic novel “The Diary of a Country Priest” by the French writer, George Bernanos, which by the way is one of the best books if you ever want to get a deep understanding of the joys and sorrows of the parish priesthood. In this scene in the book, the longtime sacristan of 40 years at the

priest's parish loses his beloved wife to death. The parish priest is speaking to him about the hope of eternal life and the Resurrection of his wife's body when Jesus returns in glory, and the sacristan's response to the priest is chilling: "the end is the end." **The sacristan had no faith; the familiarity with the sacred that he had experienced for 40 years was not in his heart.** Familiarity can truly breed contempt if we are not careful. **Another instance** the drove this point home for me was in real life. A few years back I was visiting a patient in the hospital who was probably going to die soon, and was trying to talk to him about the gift of faith in the face of death, and of the need to prepare by making a good Confession especially since he had been away from the Church for a number of years, and his response was, "there is nothing more", and he refused to go to Confession. Wow! I was speechless! It made my priestly heart very sad. I entrusted him to God's mercy, by praying a Chaplet of Divine Mercy for him later that day. I hope he repented before he died. It also made all too clear to me that satan, who Jesus calls the father of lies from the beginning, wants us to believe there is nothing more - but that is his ULTIMATE LIE!

3. **Heaven and Hell are real!** First the bad one: **Hell.** Many modern people do not want to believe Hell is real. But unfortunately it is! In fact if you study the Gospels, Jesus mentions the reality of Hell more times than He mentions Heaven! Why? Is it because Jesus is "mean" or overly "negative" or wants to "scare" His listeners into being good? No, it is because He wants us to realize that our moral and spiritual choices in this life have eternal consequences. It's a holy reality check. There are many testimonies throughout history to the reality of Hell: remember *about 15-20% of near death experiences talk about it (that is not fool-proof, but it is interesting); the story of St. Catherine of Siena and the soul in Hell that she takes up to Heaven and the soul begs to go back to Hell; two true stories about souls coming back from Hell to warn the living in the book cited last week: **Hungry Souls: Supernatural Visits, Messages, and Warnings from Purgatory**, pp. 24-25 & 26-27; see also the fictional work **The Great Divorce** by the great author C.S. Lewis.* If we die in unrepentant mortal sin, we will be separated from God forever. It serves us well to know what mortal sin is, and what actions or

inactions fall under its banner: I will go into this more sometime soon, probably before the Advent Penance Service in December. But you can study this on your own in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; see esp. section 3 on morality. Now onto the Good: **Heaven** on the other hand is best described by St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, “*Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it dawned on the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him*” (1 Corth 2:9). Heaven is so awesome it is beyond our imagining. To see God in His entire splendor, in His goodness, love and truth will fill our soul with happiness and joy beyond any earthly happiness by an infinite degree. To see the angels and the saints, and our loved ones and friends who are saved, in all their beauty and goodness will also be amazing. Finally we will see people for who they really are - rather than the weakness and sin that clouded over our true nature in this world. **Sometimes it seems too good to be true** as we go through this earthly life which is often a vale of tears, as we say in the *Hail Holy Queen* prayer. But remember everything we go through in this life is used by God for our good if we let Him and unite ourselves with Jesus (see *Romans chapter 8*). I close with an excerpt from the revelations of Jesus to St. Faustina, the saint of Divine Mercy; this is St. Faustina speaking revealing a mystical vision Jesus gave her “*One day, I saw two roads. One was broad, covered with sand and flowers, full of joy, music and all sorts of pleasures. People walked along it, dancing and enjoying themselves. They reached the end without realizing it. And at the end of the road there was a horrible precipice; that is, the abyss of hell. The souls fell blindly into it: as they walked, so they fell. And their number was so great that it was impossible to count them. And I saw the other road, or rather, a path, for it was narrow and strewn with thorns and rocks; and the people who walked along it had tears in their eyes, and all kinds of suffering befell them. Some fell down upon the rocks, but stood up immediately and went on. At the end of the road there was a magnificent garden filled with all sorts of happiness, and the souls entered there. At the every first instant they forgot all their sufferings. (See *The Diary of Divine Mercy in My Soul*, paragraph 153 - it can be purchased at www.marian.org). The narrow way of the Cross leads to joy everlasting! Never forget that reality! God bless you.*