

Excerpts from “The One Thing Needful,”

Sermons of Archbishop Andrei (Rymarenko, 1893-1978)

Sundays before Lent: Last Judgment.

Now we have come to the Gospel about the Last Judgment. It determines everything, for everyone and forever. “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal” (Mt. 25:46). Here everything is summed up; everything is clear, unchangeable, eternal. Here God’s Truth meets with God’s Mercy, and God’s Love with the Wisdom of God.

We walked away from Christ’s manger from which we received the spirit of adoption (sonship). On the Day of the Lord’s Circumcision, our New Year, we consciously dedicated ourselves to the service of the Lord in the coming year. On the day of the Lord’s Baptism, we received the special Grace to do God’s will. But on the very first steps of our new life we did not stand fast, but yielded to temptation and sinned. It is not without reason that the very first Sunday after the Baptism called to us: “Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Mt. 4:17). And with all the subsequent Gospels the Holy Church has been teaching us how to repent. She has given us wonderful images of repentance: Zacchaeus changed his whole life. The Publican was justified by his prayer: “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Lk. 18:13). And the Prodigal Son returned to his Father. All this is true, all this happened, and it has been repeated thousands of times throughout the history of Christ’s Church. And all of this exists right now; all this is possible for both you and me.

And the picture of the Last Judgment, which might startle us, does not disrupt our cycle of Gospel readings. It gives them meaning, makes them more exact, sums up for us all that was before in the Church and all that will be further on. After all, to be placed at the right side of the King and to hear His voice: “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom” (Mt. 25:34) — this is the purpose of our life. But we rarely think about this and often forget it.

The great Sophia Cathedral in Kiev is not dedicated to the Martyr Sophia. The word “sophia” in Greek means “wisdom,” and this Cathedral is dedicated to the Wisdom of God. The Cathedral’s feast day is celebrated on the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God. On the day of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God begins the plan of the Wisdom of God which alone can save sinners, which means all of us. The Most Holy Virgin was raised at the temple to become the Mother of God. She experienced the day of the Annunciation. Then came the days of the Nativity of Christ, the flight into Egypt, the hard life in Nazareth, and finally they led her Godly Son to Crucifixion. They led Him away! The Mother of God was at the Cross. Her Son was dying on the Cross.

Here is how the Wisdom of God accomplishes our salvation; and how the Truth of God is satisfied. In fact, another similar sacrifice could not even have been conceived. This is the Pure Lamb of God, Who takes upon Himself the sin of the world. Why, there is not a single person in existence who could become the sacrifice for the sins of the world. After all, there is no man without sin. And if anyone suffers, then this is for his own sins. Only Christ could accomplish this, because He alone was without sin. He is the Only One, the Irreplaceable One... “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30).

On the western wall of the Kiev cathedral of St. Vladimir, remarkable for its murals, right over the entrance to the church is a wonderful representation of the Last Judgment. First of all, we are struck by the mass of people, their faces, eyes. And you have the vivid awareness that you are among them. Involuntarily, you try to find yourself, to determine your place according to your spiritual state. And within you occurs, as it were, a private judgment upon yourself. There are faces

expressing terrible sorrow, a totally perished life trembles in them. There are others, 11 of malice, hatred, murmuring, envy, insatiable desires. **fe passed on, but something is gnawing at them and will eternally gnaw at them.

But here, rays of light start to break their way through the enormous clouds, and they show us other faces: quiet, calm, joyful, happy. This is life! And the closer they are to the Throne, the more clear these faces are. And over the Throne shines the Cross. On the Throne is seated the Lord Savior of the world Himself, and around Him, John the Baptist, the Apostles, all the Saints are praying, triumphing. Here is harmonious rejoicing. Only one cry, one wail disturbs it. The Mother of God has fallen on the shoulder of Christ, and she alone is pleading for the salvation of sinners, for mercy for all those without hope. She alone has been given the power to intercede to the end before the Mercy of God.

Dear brothers and sisters! Wherever you may be in this terrible picture, do not despair. You have not yet perished! There is our Mother. She is whispering for you, and it is doubtful that even the Almighty God can refuse her. She is the “finder of those who are lost.” Just believe in this and warmth will begin to fill your heart, and a new hope will light up in it. Then love of the Wisdom of God will begin to reveal itself to you!