

Sunday of the Last Judgment / 7th of Ten Commandments

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

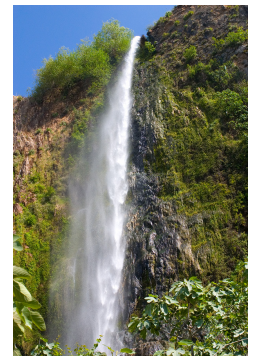
Today, the Sunday of the last Judgment, is an appropriate day to resume our study of the Ten Commandments. We have now reached the seventh of these sacred commandments, which is "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14)—this is, of course, THE difficult commandment, the embarrassing one. So, before taking a close and careful look at this commandment, let me say a few words about the Last Judgment, which actually establishes a wholesome context for our study of the Commandments.



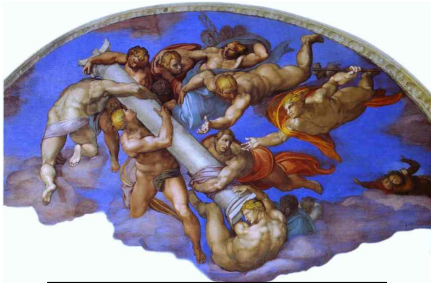
I say, let me speak a "few words," yet volumes could be written about this the Last Judgment. This subject, like the Ten Commandments themselves, has been trivialized or downright ignored in much of our religious feeling and teaching today, which is mushy and easy going and has to do with warm fuzzies and making us feel satisfied and justified in our own minds. We are rarely challenged any more. **But if anything should challenge us in our very core, it is this Sunday, the Sunday of the Last Judgment.** As my spiritual father, Hieromonk Seraphim of Platina, once said to me: "The Church does not exist in order to make us comfortable; she exists in order to *challenge* us" so that we will change and grow from being the little demons we are now into being angels.

During the Vespers service last night we heard the following hymn: *When Thou shalt come, O righteous Judge, to execute just judgment, seated on Thy throne of glory, a river of fire will draw all men amazed before Thy judgment-seat; the powers of heaven will stand beside Thee, and in fear mankind will be judged according to the deeds that each has done. Then spare us, Christ, in Thy compassion, with faith we entreat Thee, and count us worthy of Thy blessings with those that are saved.* (Vespers Stichera from the Triodion)

This "river of fire" is nothing less than the very love of God Himself, a veritable torrent of love such as we cannot understand, comprehend, or fully receive in this life time. The only analogy for this love that I can think of—and it is an imperfect one—is if we imagine God's love, this river of fire, to be the largest and strongest waterfall on earth, and we are at the bottom, trying to swallow that entire water fall. That is what it will be like to encounter the "river of fire" which is God's love—only even much more! It will be, for those who are saved, unending bliss and ecstasy, and for those who are damned, it will be the very fires of hell, an unending torment. This is a *fact* revealed to us by revelation. New Agers like to tell us that there is no hell, no devil, no punishment for sin, no accountability. It's all around us, in the very air we breathe today. But don't you be taken in by this! On your very faith in Jesus Christ, Lord, God, and Savior, don't be taken in!



What many don't know is that, according to the Holy Fathers of the Church, the final judgment that will take place on the Last Day will reveal any sins we have *not* confessed and turned away from. Sins which we have confessed and repented of will not be revealed on that day. This is a huge blessing for us! Pity those who do not have the sacrament of confession! This is why the sacrament of confession is so very important to us as Orthodox believers and why we should eagerly as well as soberly seek it out.



Michaelangelo-Last Judgment

Thus, it follows that if we are really and truly given over, body and soul, to Jesus Christ, then we have nothing to fear from the Last Judgment. Still, though, as frail human beings with a fallen nature, we have a natural fear, don't we? And this emotion is often mentioned in the services for this Sunday; in fact, according to one writer, "it is this very emotion [fear] that pours forth in abundance from the hymns and prayers of the divine services celebrated on this great day, and one therefore that deserves our fair and full attention. In...the Matins Canon, we

hear: *The Lord comes to judge: who can endure the sight of Him? Tremble thou, my wretched soul, and tremble and prepare for thy departure.*" Our modern world, however, steers as completely away from this as possible, and this is because we don't like the idea of accountability, the fact that we will be held responsible for how we have used this precious lifetime given to us by God. This is also why we hear less and less about the Ten Commandments any more.

Many Christians have chosen to focus on Christ not as Judge, but as the Lord of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. They have forgotten that He is not only the God of compassion, but also the God of perfect Justice. Of course it *is* accurate to see Him as love and mercy, during the span of this world's existence, for such He truly is. Until the Last Day of creation our Lord will continue to be eager to receive us all into His loving mercy and forgiveness. But that comes to an end with the Last Judgment, when He comes again to Judge the world. The window of opportunity for forgiveness and mercy is NOW, while we still have breath and the world lasts. If we are counting on receiving that at the Last Judgment, we are in tragic delusion.

Simply put, then, this particular Sunday is placed by the Church here, as one of the preparatory Sundays leading us to Lent, in order to remind us forcefully to have fear for the *present* sinful state of our lives, and to repent and confess.

This kind of healthy fear leads us to compunction, and compunction leads us to humility, and humility to repentance (that is the complete renunciation of our sins), and repentance leads to eternal life. We are not called to be 'scared' or feel hopeless, but to be prompted into action.

Now, within this context and with this foundation, I turn to the Ten Commandments and the seventh of them in my series of talks on the Old Testament Law of God. **"Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14)** In our hyper-sexualized culture we almost never talk about this commandment any more. Questions about nudity, immodest and tempting dress on the part of both men and women (including even children!), TV programs, films, lyrics of popular songs, novels—all of these are, to one degree or another, drenched in a cesspool of illicit sex. If we *do* talk about the Seventh Commandment, it is only to see the letter of the commandment, and not its spirit. We think: "Well, I don't commit adultery," so therefore I'm not guilty of violating this sin." But as we see in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ elevates the commandments of the Old Testament to a much higher and more intense level. Remember when He told His followers that if they even *look* on another with lust in their hearts, they have committed adultery?

In other words, not only actions but all our thoughts and feelings must also be chaste and pure. In order to avoid sins related to sexual immorality, we must shun all that evokes unclean feelings, such as unbridled behavior, obscene conversations, music and dancing which arouses lustful desires, watching indecent movies and magazines, and the like.

The Holy Fathers of the Church, in their extensive commentaries on the Ten Commandments, further explain that this commandment also has to do with the integrity and fidelity of the family. In spite of all contemporary efforts to justify and even legalize homosexuality as something comparable to marriage, the Bible unambiguously declares it to be a grave sin.

In fact, the Scriptures tell us that *all* sexual behavior or activity, *outside* of marriage—that includes pre-marital sex, fornication, masturbation, as well as homosexual behavior—is forbidden because it darkens the soul and draws down a heavy veil between us and God.

Like our appetite for food, our appetite for sex and reproduction are disordered appetites—disordered by the fall of man. In order not to become fat and sicken ourselves, or too thin and threaten our health, we must discipline our appetite for food. The same thing is true for the sexual appetite. Even within marriage it should not be wanton and brazen, but an expression genuine and devoutly loving communication between a husband and a wife. But our culture today portrays sex as angry, violent, animalistic, and out-of-control, like so many of our passions. Is it a coincidence that the United States is sunk in pornography and immorality, more than any other country, and that our materialism is greater than anywhere else, or that we are the most obese people on the face of the earth? It's all related. Disordered passions: that, passions which are out of control. It is what has also led to our living in debt and on credit, part of what brought about our ongoing economic collapse.

On this Sunday of the Last Judgment, brothers and sisters, let us all look at this very soberly and clear-eyed. Let us examine the ways in which, if we were to die before nightfall, we will

be judged, and let us be quick to repent—that is completely turn away from our sins, whatever they may be, *Now*. And let us ask the Lord for a strong and courageous spirit that will enable us to faithfully keep not just the letter of the Ten Commandments, but their spirit, as well.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.