

What is eternal life and the kingdom of heaven? (Alexandros Christodoulou)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Meatfare Sunday

Today's Gospel gives an anthropomorphic description of the fundamental dogma of our faith regarding Christ's Second Coming on earth and the Judgement. The throne on which Christ will sit depicts the majesty of the judgement, its impartiality, and the separation of people. In fact, everything happens all at once. The Judge has no need of any particular procedure in order to reach His verdict: people are judged according to their works.

Our works demonstrate our true or disordered freedom. True freedom is when we align our will with that of God. Disordered freedom is the opposite of that. Free will, which is God's greatest gift to us, is what separates us from all the other creatures and gives us the opportunity for a conscious relationship with our Creator. We are solely responsible for the use or misuse of the gift of free will.



The Lord sets love in its social dimension as the basic criterion. It's the great virtue which saved the world, the characteristic feature of His chosen disciples. Those who love are heirs to the Kingdom. Christ conceals Himself in the faces of the poor, those in pain, the homeless, the persecuted, the oppressed, the least among us, who are despised and ignored.

The Judge concludes that those who didn't recognize Him on earth, in the faces of His brothers and sisters, will go to eternal hell while the righteous will go to eternal life. What is this eternal life in the Kingdom of heaven?

This is a difficult question for us, since we're transient and mortal. We see things outside the world 'through a glass darkly'. In his second epistle to the Corinthians, Saint Paul says that he was caught up into heaven and heard ineffable words which it's not proper for people to utter (II Cor. 12, 4). The Lord allowed him to live for a short time in the reality of the kingdom, but he wasn't in a position to express what he saw and heard during the brief period of his rapture. He couldn't find the words, any appropriate images and concepts, to express the mystical circumstances he'd experienced.

The Kingdom of God is a locus of boundless, endless, great joy, where there's no 'pain, sorrow or sighing'. It's permanent participation in divine bliss. In the Kingdom of God, there'll be communion of grace in the uncreated light of Christ. Even on earth, those who are born again taste the grace of the Holy Spirit, which fills them

with inexpressible sweetness. In eternal life, they'll be leavened with uncreated grace and will, so far as this is possible for created beings, be gods, gazing upon God face to face (I Cor. 13, 12). The righteous, the saints, will commune with the angels. What they won't be able to see is the inexpressible mystery of the infinite divine essence.

Those who have lived in the earthly Kingdom of God, the Church, will be transplanted into heaven. These souls won't remember the unpleasant things of earthly life, nor will they be aware of the people who are in hell, in the place of torment. Nothing will threaten the joy of the new life, which is due to the mystical relationship of God with the righteous. Christ revealed this reality through parables which described pleasant events in our earthly life, such as banquets and weddings. The ten virgins await the Bridegroom. Of these, five were prepared and managed to enter into His chamber, that is the heavenly Kingdom.

There can't be anything impure in the Kingdom of Heaven. In the Revelation of Saint John it says: 'Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood' (22, 15). The man who didn't have a wedding garment yet dared to enter the banquet of joy was thrown out by the servants (Matth. 22, 13). Those who enter the Kingdom of Heaven will be free of the passions: the 'pure in heart', the 'poor in spirit', those who mourn, the peacemakers, the meek, the merciful, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Those who have not cleansed themselves through repentance won't enter the realm of light.

The Lord said: 'In my Father's house, there are many rooms' (Jn. 14, 2) and Saint Paul says that each star differs in glory (I Cor. 15, 4). These expressions are meant to show that there'll be differences in the way we participate in the Kingdom of God. Not all those who are deified will enjoy the same degree of divine glory and bliss. This difference won't be perceptible. Those who have less light won't be bothered by this. All will be filled with light, depending on their receptiveness, and will feel complete. The light of the great saints will illumine those who have less and will increase their bliss.

And we can also experience something of this bliss of the heavenly Kingdom even here on earth. A little of Christ's uncreated light enters and illumines created nature. At the Transfiguration, the disciples saw the light of Christ, 'insofar as they could'. This is experienced by a few, pure people in whom the grace of the Holy Spirit dwells. Usually, these are people who live 'far from the madding crowd', from temptations and the problems of the world, in the desert. They're monastics, who dedicate themselves entirely to God and reach a state of great spiritual

purification. When they say the Jesus prayer, they see Christ's blessed light.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa, in his funeral oration for his brother, Saint Basil the Great, describes how the latter experienced the divine light: '(Moses) was filled with the divine light. And we have something similar to this vision in the case of Basil the Great: at night, when he prayed the house was filled with light. This light was immaterial and filled the dwelling with divine power'. In this way, the words of the Lord are fulfilled: 'blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'.

The Church urges and encourages us to seek the Kingdom above, to keep Christ's bridal chamber before us: 'I see your bridal chamber adorned, my Saviour, and I have no wedding garment so that I may enter there. Make the robe of my soul to shine, Giver of Light, and save me'. May the Lord count us worthy to hold a little, lighted candle in His uncreated light, on the day of judgement.