

So I'm going to remind you of something that you already know: we're all going to die some day. Obviously we don't know exactly when, but we do know that it will happen. I don't care how many anti-aging creams, surgeries, or drugs are sold to us, how many great diets and workouts we might do, we will *not* live on this earth forever. Such a realization is actually liberating given that it empowers us to live this gift of life to the full and to live each day as if it were our last. Accepting our mortality enables us to prepare for our immortality.

As disciples of Jesus, we must all be prepared for death and yes for our own eternal judgment. This isn't "fear-mongering" on my part, rather this is objective reality, whether we like it or not—whether it makes us uncomfortable or not. As disciples of Jesus, the sobering reality is that when we individually die, we will indeed be judged by our personal actions. We will be judged by how we loved God and our neighbor or how we failed to love God and our neighbor.

It's important to remember that our *personal, individual* salvation is *not* automatically guaranteed simply because we *believe* in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Our faith in Christ *must* be manifested through our

very life, through our words and actions—*our Catholic faith must come alive by how we live and love*. This is what our Lord Himself reveals to us in the Letter to St. James when He says, “For just as a body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (James 2:26).

Brothers and sisters, as we just heard from the lips of Jesus in today’s Gospel, *Heaven and Hell are real*. It is possible for us to choose one over the other. Heaven being an absolutely perfect state of eternal union with the Trinity—eternal life. Hell being an absolutely terrifying state of eternal separation from the Trinity—eternal death.

If you want further evidence that the Catholic faith is not the product of self-deluded wishful thinking, simply consider the objective reality of Hell. I mean who in their right mind would ever want to experience Hell? And who would ever *wish* for such a horrifying state to exist? I honestly *wish* that I didn’t have to talk to you about Hell, but if I refuse to do so, I would be seriously neglecting my sacred duty as a priest and spiritual father is who called to lovingly tell you the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God—especially those sobering truths from the Gospel that can be hard to accept!

Christ's Church teaches in the Catechism that, "To die in mortal sin *without repenting* and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him forever by our *own free choice*. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell."

Brothers and sisters, the *only* reason I'm talking about all of this is because our *Lord Jesus* is talking about all of this in today's Gospel, particularly in the context of the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. Notice how Jesus says at the end of today's Gospel: "Whoever has ears ought to hear," and whenever our Lord says that, we need seriously pay attention and listen. So the only reason I'm talking about Hell is because our loving Savior talks about the absolute reality of Hell in today's Gospel when He refers to the destiny of the weeds at the time of the harvest, which, as Jesus explains, is a metaphor for the Final Judgment at the end of time. In fact, biblical scholars have definitively concluded that our Lord Jesus talks about Hell *more than any other person in the Bible*. So I'm simply reaffirming what our Lord Jesus Himself says in today's Gospel and throughout His public ministry.

One of the most profound statements of our loving Savior on Heaven and Hell is from Matthew 7:13-14 when Christ says: “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.”

Now I’ve heard many people ask the question: “Why would an all-good and loving God send anyone to Hell?” While that’s certainly a valid and legitimate question, I think the more accurate and fundamental question is this: “Why would anyone choose Hell over an all-good and loving God—why would anyone knowingly and deliberately reject a God Who is Perfect Love and Goodness itself?” I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: God’s love and mercy is so perfect that to reject it would be so evil.

It’s also important to clarify and to repeat what the Church teaches, which is that if anyone goes to Hell, it is their *own free choice*! God only sends souls to Hell *if they so choose it*! Hell is an eternal punishment for those who freely and knowingly reject God through

unrepentant mortal sin—it is a punishment freely chosen by *unrepentant* grave sinners who refuse to change and accept God’s love and mercy.

Now it’s important to clarify and emphasize that ***God doesn’t want anyone to go to Hell but rather He wants everyone to be with Him in Heaven forever!*** God Himself reveals this in St. Paul’s First Letter to Timothy 2:4: “This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who *wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.*” The Lord also reveals this in the Second Letter of St. Peter 3:9: “The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard “delay,” but he is patient with you, *not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*” Make no mistake, God lovingly desires the eternal salvation of *every* person, but He also respects our freedom and so He will not force the gift of salvation upon anyone!

This is why God gave us free will, so that we may freely respond to His infinite love and goodness poured out to us through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is our Hope and eternal salvation! As the Way, the Truth, and the Life, our Lord Jesus is our invitation to be happy with God now and forever in Heaven. God loves us too much to force us to

be with Him in Heaven! God gave us the gift of free will so that we might freely accept the gift of salvation with our whole life! And this gift of salvation in Christ is accepted *precisely* when we *live this gift through a life of holiness*—all with the necessary help of God’s grace because we simply can’t do it on our own. In order to receive Jesus, we must depend entirely on Jesus.

In a certain sense, one could argue that Hell is actually *proof* of God’s infinite love, goodness, and justice. Just think about this: I mean, what would you think of a parent or a sheriff who *never* condemned or punished evil behavior or crimes? I don’t know about you, but I’d begin to think that such a negligent and indifferent parent or sheriff was actually evil themselves given their refusal to punish or condemn such evil behavior. So if God did not condemn or punish evil, then He would *not* be an all-good and loving God. If God refused to condemn or punish evil, then He would essentially be condoning and supporting such evil, thereby rendering Him an evil god. And yet we know through reason and Divine Revelation that God is infinite Goodness, Justice, and Love itself and that *most certainly* at death and the end of time, He *will*

punish evil in a definitive way. God alone is the perfect Judge Who knows the totality of a person's soul. And He is a merciful and just Judge as He reminds us today in the Responsorial Psalm: "Lord, you are good and forgiving."

Brothers and sisters, our merciful and loving Savior *never* stops inviting us to repentance in this life. Through the Holy Spirit, He is always calling out to us, inviting us as prodigal sons to turn away from evil and come home into His loving embrace and receive His all-powerful mercy which gives us new life and raises us from the dead of our own sinfulness! Our Lord Jesus is always calling out to us by name saying, "come back to Me! My merciful love is greater than all of your sins!" Indeed there is *no sin* too great for God's infinite mercy and love. In this earthly life, it is *never too late* to repent and turn back to our merciful Lord, Who is *always* willing to forgive us and raise us to new life, especially through the Sacrament of Reconciliation!

So as we prepare to worship and receive our merciful and just Judge in the Most Holy Eucharist, Source of all necessary and sufficient grace, may we receive everything the Lord wants to give us with an

open mind and heart so that we may be happy with Him now and forever
in Heaven.