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Feast of Christ the King: Last Judgment & Sins of Omission

by [Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Ph.D.](#)



On the final Sunday in the Roman Catholic liturgical year, it is time to remember things that we'd prefer to forget. For starters, we recall that there is an infinite qualitative difference between us and God. He is immortal and infinite. We are not. Each one of us will come to our individual end. But so will our society, our world, even our universe.

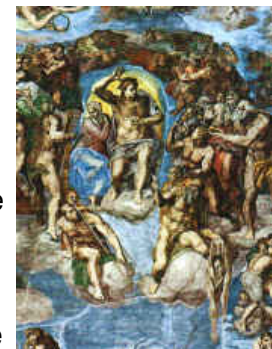


Another thing to call to mind on this day is that while the Son of God came the first time in a way both lowly and hidden, he will come one day in a way both public and glorious. Yes, he is the Lamb of God. But He is also the Lion of Judah. He takes away the sin of those who let him. But he is also will bring things hidden in darkness into the light, call a spade a spade, and insist all bear the consequences of their choices.

That is what any judge does. And he will come in glory, says the creed, to judge the living and the dead.

But what will the Last Judgment be like? By what criteria will we be judged?

Only one passage in the Gospels provides a sneak preview of that day of reckoning--Matthew 25:31-46. First of all, note that most of Jesus' parables have a jarring punch line. He's always upsetting the preconceived notions of just about everyone, especially the most religious of the bunch, whether they be Pharisees or disciples.



Clearly, all of us expect that the Judge will condemn evil and impose sentence on the guilty. And we tend to think of evildoing as stepping over the line and infringing on the rights of others, taking their possessions, maybe even taking their lives. The language of the Our Father lends itself to this interpretation of sin when it says "forgive us our trespasses."

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The problem with this understanding of sin is that it is incomplete, even shallow. Lots of people think that as long as they don't lie, cheat, and steal, but just keep to themselves and mind their own business, they deserve big rewards from God.



The story of the Last Judgment addresses these “decent folks.” Imagine their shock as they swagger smugly up to the judge’s bench expecting praise only to be sent off to eternal punishment! Why? Because they neglected to do the good love required of them to do. They did not “commit” offenses or infractions of the law; they did nothing positively destructive. They just, in the presence of suffering, heartlessly did absolutely nothing. Their sin was not a sin of “commission” but a sin of “omission.” But note—these sins of omission ultimately seal the fate

of the damned.

There are lots of negative commandments, often expressed as “thou shalt not’s.” But the two most important commandments are positive “thou shalt’s”. “You shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and strength and you shall love thy neighbor as yourself.” These commandments require an interior disposition that issues in outward actions. If you are hungry, you love yourself enough to go to the fridge or drive to McDonald’s. If you truly love your hungry neighbor as yourself, you don’t just say a prayer and offer sympathy (James 2:15-17). Loving God with all your heart doesn’t mean giving a respectful nod to God and then going on your merry way. It means going out of your way, passionately seeking to love him and serve him in all that you do.

In this Last Judgment scene we see how these two commandments, these two loves, are really one. Jesus makes clear that loving God with your whole heart is expressed in loving your neighbor as yourself. And whenever you love your neighbor in this way, you are actually loving the Son of God.



So ultimately, the judgment is simple. It all comes down to love. The judge happens to be the King of hearts.

This was originally published in [Our Sunday Visitor](#) as a reflection upon the readings for the 34th Sunday of the Year, the Feast of Christ the King, liturgical cycle A (Ezek 34:11-17, Ps 23, I Cor 15:20-28; Mt 25:31-46). It is reprinted here with the permission of the author.

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by: Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Ph.D.



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