

Fear and Love God (Mal. 3:14-18; Rev. 22:6-13; Luk. 12:42-48;)

* Today is the last Sunday of the Church Year. When speaking of symbolical language of the parable *The Wheat and The Tares* the end of the Church Year stands for the close of the ages. From this parable we've learned that in the last day *God's angels will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father, (Mat 13:41-43). Reflecting on Jesus' remark regarding his coming quickly (Rev 22:12), we heartily appreciate the Father who art in Heaven for his promise to hear our prayers. The time we are living now is still favorable; any unrepentant sinner is welcome to repent and receive the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, (Mar 1:15). On the other hand, it might seem that the Lord doesn't care much about sin and justice because the arrogant are blessed, the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape, (Mal 3:15). In contrast to this picture, the last days also will reveal the righteous who will strive for righteousness anyway. In (Rev 22:11) we read, *Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.*

* Now being intrigued with what the Scripture teaches about the spiritual and moral condition preceding the final harvest, we set out for further knowledge throughout the passages assigned for today.

On hearing the message, our thought will progressively lead to the conclusion, - the judgment of God is at hand. Starting from Malachi, the Scripture trumpets the news, - God's people stopped striving for righteousness because they didn't observe and experience God's justice. The next reading from Revelation trumpets other news; God intentionally withdrew his justice, but once in a while. And finally, the gospel reading from Luke trumpets the affirmation of God's justice as it's all in good time. Along with the knowledge of the upcoming judgment, our texts affiliate with knowledge regarding the spiritual gifts - the fear of God and love of God. These virtues should be considered as the big treasures that lead the righteous to honor and please God from all their hearts. These virtues help to establish the close relationship with the Almighty, like between a father and his son. *"They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him,* (Mal 3:17).

* As soon as we perceived the fear of God as the real treasure of one's heart, we want to explore this subject a little bit more. A good illustration is always good to hear. So let's hear it. The story is about a king who taught his brother how to fear God. One time the king found himself in a bad mood. Seeking after someone who wants him out of his depression, he sent for his brother, the prince. When his brother arrived, the king opened his heart to him, and in the end the king noticed, *"I am a great sinner, and I fear to meet God."* *"You worry too much",* said the prince, and he laughed at him."

At once, the king received a glimpse of his brother's wickedness. "*I should to help him,*" thought the king. In those days it was customary for the executioner to sound a trumpet before a man's door as a signal that the man was condemned to death. The king sent his men in the dead of night to sound the fateful blast at his brother's door. Being frightened to death the prince quickly dressed, and when he stepped to the door, he was immediately seized, and dragged pale and trembling into the king's presence. In an agony of terror, he fell on his knees before the king begging for the forgiveness of his offences. "*My brother,*" said the king, "*if the sight of a human executioner so terrified you, shall not I, having grievously offended God, fear to be brought before the judgment seat of Christ?*"

* Friends, aren't you afraid to be brought before the judgment seat of Christ as well as that pious king? As for me, I am afraid; even though the Spirit witnesses to me that my body is God's property. From the given illustration, we learned that the fear of punishment led the king's brother to acknowledge his sins. After that he never laughed at the king and was spared. In this sense, the fear of God is associated with the fear of being punished; it keeps a person from acting unjustly and helps him to escape an executioner. When Jesus answered *who is the faithful and prudent steward?* (Lk 12:42), he also answered the skeptics as to how he will treat a reckless servant. *He will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful.* The same way *the servant who knew his master's will but did not ... act according to his will, will receive a severe beating,* (Luke 12:48). It doesn't matter how people may interpret Jesus words, metaphorically or literally; the right conclusion is only one, - to prevent the servants from the unfaithful and wicked behavior, but if they fear not to act against God's will, then, the outcome is already known. Therefore, the fear of God is always associated with upcoming judgment, (Rev 14:7) and it keeps Christians from doing evil things, (Pro 3:7).

* After the fear of God the next mentioned treasure is the love of God. If God's love is in a person, then he should love God's commandments; as it is written, *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, says Jesus,* (Joh 14:21). The love of God's commandments makes noticeable the difference between the righteous and the wicked. That is to say, even when being mocked the righteous is supposed to act righteously, but the wicked as usual acts wickedly even when being loved. That is the difference. The Scripture teaches that in the end all things will be turned from bad to worse, (2Ti 3:1). But it shouldn't frighten us to death, rather we should love people under any circumstances.

* With this idea in mind, we look for a proper illustration. Thanks to the Lord, we find it in Mother's Teresa poetry. This poem was called, *Anyway*. It can be seen as a verbal portrait of the love of God acting in the sons and daughters of the Father. This love urges them to abide in righteousness under any circumstances as it says, *People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centered. Love them anyway!*

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Do good anyway! If you are successful, you will win false friends and enemies. Succeed anyway! The good you do will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway! Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway! What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway! People really need help but may attack you if you help them. Help them anyway! Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you've got anyway! From this we conclude, in view of the upcoming hostility and antagonism, the love of God will enable a man who does right – to do right again; the love of God will enable a man who is holy to continue to be holy, (Rev 22:11).

* The Spirit showed to his prophets the things that must soon take place, (Rev.22:6). They've seen the visions that the lawlessness increases and the love of many grow cold. Contrary to this, some servants work out God's given treasury diligently until the end; even a common dislike doesn't stop them to do what is right. To them Jesus addresses the benediction, *Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.* (Luk 12:43-44). But the servants who despise God's treasures given them fail in their vocations; they will be cut into pieces and share the one destiny with the wicked, (Luk12:46). Friends, that is a scary end, isn't it?

* It seems our journey taken throughout the passages of the three readings comes to an end. Now it is time to sum up all we've learned. Because today is the Last Sunday in the Church Year, we've concentrated on the last things. Today the Word and the Spirit trumpet again, "Be aware, the time of judgment is at hand, please your Lord and do what is righteous." Hopefully, the upcoming judgment has frightened us against doing the nasty things. Then, after hearing the trumpeting message, it shouldn't surprise us anymore that the arrogant are blessed, evildoers often prosper, and those who challenge God still escape. At the same time, it shouldn't surprise us that the righteous are blessed, the holy succeed and those who fear and love God already prosper. Finally, we are told that the time of great opportunity is still available for all people because God doesn't want anyone to perish but to be saved, (1Ti 2:4).

* Now we pray. Dear Lord and Master of all ages, we thank you for being assigned as partakers in the life-given mystery through faith in Christ Jesus. We beseech you, sustain us in the fear and in the love of God and help us to work out our duties anyway. Grant us to appear before the judgment seat of Christ as the good servants and to be blessed with the everlasting life. For the sake of your honorable name we pray,

Amen.

Beloved, let the fear and the love of God keep your mind and hearts in Christ Jesus.

Amen.