

33<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – B (November 14, 2021)

Twenty-five years ago this past summer, in 1996, I had the joy of going to Rome with some parishioners from Forest City and Lake Mills where I was pastor at the time—we were there for the Mass where Archbishop Hanus received the pallium from Pope St. John Paul II. There were many highlights, including the Sistine Chapel to see some of the world’s most famous paintings by Michaelangelo—one of the most famous artists in history. One wall of that chapel is covered entirely by his painting of the Last Judgment; it’s a dramatic portrayal of Christ with the saints, angels and the righteous surrounding him in heavenly glory, while the condemned are shown going ‘down’ to eternal punishment.

The readings today call that scene to mind and the future reality of the Last Judgment that will occur at the end of time; they dovetail with those from last weekend when we focused on the individual judgment each person will face at his/her death. Today we hear Daniel describe how some who will be awakened from the dust of the earth (i.e. raised from the dead) “shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.” Jesus in the gospel speaks clearly how he, the Son of Man, will come ‘in the clouds with great power and glory and...send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds’. In the Creed we affirm our belief that “He (Jesus) will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead”. And the Catechism reaffirms this faith: “In the presence of Christ, who is Truth itself,...[t]he Last Judgment will reveal even to its furthest consequences the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life” (n. 1039).

So there will indeed be a Last Judgment; it is a fundamental element of the Christian faith. It stems from the very words of Christ, whose words are true and are forever verified by his own death and resurrection. And it’s a logical and necessary consequence of the fact that Jesus calls us to ongoing conversion, to growth in holiness and turning away from sin...and our freely-chosen response of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to that call will determine our eternal destiny. Actions, as we noted last weekend, do indeed have consequences.

But in addition to the Last Judgment being a revealed truth of our faith, it also makes sense even with respect to our own human sense of justice—what is fair, what is right. That sense of justice seems to be part of our DNA, of what it means to be human. Youngsters complain: “it’s not fair—he got a bigger piece of cake than me!” Teenagers argue: “it’s not fair—my friends get to stay out later than I do!” Adults grumble: “it’s not fair—my co-worker got a raise and I didn’t, even though I do more and better work!”

No—perfect justice seems elusive, whether we are talking about cake, curfews, or co-workers. And that is especially the case when we consider how often great evil seems to triumph. Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Tse-Tung (and many such others) were directly responsible for the death of millions of people (many from their own countries). Tens of millions of unborn children in this country alone--the most innocent and most defenseless of all—are victims of abortion, a deadly procedure praised as good and needed by way too many public officials, especially those who say they profess the Catholic faith. Far too many children and young people are victimized through human trafficking, sex slavery, pornography (online and elsewhere) and other abuse—whether committed by clergy, family, teachers or anyone else. We

hear, read or learn of such serious sins, such horrible offenses against human life and dignity; far too often the perpetrators seem to suffer no consequences, and we cry out “it’s not fair’ ...and indeed it is not.

We all long for justice and fairness in all matters—great, small, and everywhere in between. But we cannot achieve or attain perfect justice ourselves for a rather simple reason: our own sins, our own failings, our own injustices. We strive for justice in our human settings, and well we should—in our courts, legal systems, and all others aspects of human society. But ultimate and perfect justice can and will be achieved only by God...and the Last Judgment is the ultimate proof and guarantee of that divine promise. Our Catechism says it well in declaring that “[t]he Last Judgment will reveal that God’s justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God’s love is stronger than death” (n. 1040). In his encyclical on hope (*Spe Salvi*, 2007), Pope Benedict XVI wrote that the question of justice is “the strongest argument in favor of faith in eternal life” (n. 43). He also teaches that “God is justice and creates justice. This is our consolation and our hope. And in his justice there is also grace...Grace does not cancel out justice. It does not make wrong into right...Evildoers, in the end, do not sit at table at the eternal banquet beside their victims without distinction, as though nothing had happened” (n. 44).

Yes, indeed: “[t]he Last Judgment will reveal that God’s justice triumphs over all...injustices” (CCC 1040). But let’s not forget that each of us will be in that vast crowd of the entire human race at that moment, where we will all be in the immediate presence of the Lord when we won’t be able to hide or sugarcoat our own injustices, our own contributions to the sin of the world. Indeed, the Catechism also tells us that the “message of the Last Judgment calls men to conversion while God is still giving them ‘the acceptable time...It proclaims the ‘blessed hope of the Lord’s return, when he will come ‘to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all who have believed’” (n.1041). At that moment, at that prelude to the eternal fulfillment of all that God has promised and won for us through his Son, we will finally be able to see and declare with perfect clarity: “Lord, it is fair! You are justice and truth! You are the perfection of mercy and love!” God grant us all the grace to rejoice in that eternal victory.