



The Judgement that Awaits Us

The Love that moves the sun and the stars loves us with a love that is completely free and freely complete. Nothing forced our Creator to love us into being in the beginning, nor did anyone compel our Redeemer to love us “to the end,” as He did on the Cross—giving everything away for us and holding onto nothing for Himself. God loves us freely and completely, and He wants us to love Him freely and completely in return.

Scripture reveals this divine design for our happiness when God commands us to love Him “with all [our] heart, with all [our] soul, and with all [our] might,” not because we *have to*, but because we *want to*. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free,” St. Paul says. In the Word made Flesh the love of God breaks into human freedom as its Way, its Truth, and its Life.

Our last breath will deliver us into the presence of our Maker to give an account of our stewardship for the years He gratuitously entrusted to us. That impending Judgement casts a purgatorial shadow backwards onto the deeds and misdeeds of this life. Shameful memories of what I’ve done wrong and what I’ve failed to do right give me ample reason to tremble for my fate. If my memory locks down onto my sin-filled past, though, I align myself with the merciless judgement

of Satan, the Great Accuser, who knows only the language of damnation.

Faith lifts my gaze upward in hope, for the Judge before Whom I will stand speaks the language of mercy. He has shown us His face—the Holy Face of the Redeemer—and He asks the Father for “another Paraclete,” the Holy Spirit, to come to our side and defend us. What kind of a case can the Spirit make for me?

Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you,” the Prodigal says in the parable. “I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” Having willfully distanced himself from the freedom of sonship, he can claim no share in the family inheritance. Then, astonishingly, his father’s forgiveness ushers him back into it in full.

The Holy Spirit pleads for us, St. Paul says, “in sighs too deep for words.” Our merciful Jesus does not fail to heed this plea from the depths on behalf of my wounded freedom. He knows how I’ve *sinned*, and He knows how I’ve been *sinned against*—what others *did* to me that they *shouldn’t* have done, and what they *didn’t* do for me that they *should* have done. Only He Who was crucified for me can assess the extent to which the sins of others built up fear and ignorance within me, diminished my freedom, and drove me away from my Heavenly Father. None but the Just Judge can weigh my sinfulness on a scale rightly balanced. For only against the backdrop of His crucified love for me can I see the full truth of my life and say “yes” to it wholeheartedly.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," the Nazarene said as He was nailed to the Cross. Three hours later the Good Thief beside Him mustered all the freedom he could summon to make a life-ending request: "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." A gasping reply brought home to his heart the truth that set him free forever: "This day you will be with Me in Paradise."