

Chapter IX

He Shall Come To Judge

Translated From The French By MRS. J. Sadlier.
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SEVENTH ARTICLE OF THE CREED.

From thence He shall come, to judge both the living and the dead.

130. Balthazar's Feast. - Do you remember, my young friends, the story of Balthazar's feast, which you have read in your Sacred History of the Bible? I know of nothing which more resembles the Last Judgement, or, at least, the terror with which the wicked shall be struck on that day. Balthazar, was acting as the king of Babylon. (Being the crown prince he ruled from Babylon during his father's absence from the capital. As the legitimate successor he was regarded as 'son' of the greatest Babylonian emperor, Nebuchadnezzar). He gave a great banquet to a thousand of the principal lords of his court. In the intoxication of his impious joy, he insulted the God of Israel, and caused to be brought forth the sacred vases which his 'father,' Nebuchadnezzar, had formerly taken from the Temple of Jerusalem, shamelessly making his officers and courtiers drink from them. All at once he stops, is silent, turns pale and trembles, his knees knock together. What, then, ails him? is he no longer the mighty king and prince of Babylon? does he no longer see around him his faithful friends, the officers of his palace, the generals of his armies? Yes, but he perceives a hand gliding along the wall of the apartment and writing three Chaldean words Mane, (this was repeated,) Thecel, Phares. No one could solve this enigma, till the Prophet Daniel was brought, and he explained its meaning frankly and courageously. "Prince," said he to the king, "your crimes have reached their height, and the hour of my God's vengeance is close at hand. His hand it is that has traced those words. Mane means that He has counted your days, and the end is come; Thecel means that He has weighed your actions in the balance of His justice, and you have been found wanting; Phares means that He has divided your kingdom, and given it to the Medes and Persians." This terrible prediction was speedily fulfilled, for, that very night whilst Balthazar feasted his courtiers, Cyrus the Great of Persia, sent one of his great generals, Darius known as the Mede, who took Babylon, and with one blow put an end to his kingdom, his life, and his impiety. (Later Darius himself was removed from the capital and Cyrus ruled with full authority.) A striking image this of what awaits us at the last Judgement: God will count over our days, weigh our actions, and treat us according to our deserts. - Daniel, Chapter V.

131. A Solitary at the Tribunal of God. - St. John Climachus, that pious doctor or teacher of the Church, who lived in the sixth century, relates that a solitary, named Stephen, having reached an extreme old age, fell ill, and appeared at the point of death. Some hours before he breathed his last, he appeared all at once, as it were, beside himself. He was seen to glance fearfully around on every side, like one who is surrounded by enemies. Then the spectators were witness of a strange sight; it seemed to them that the dying man was before a tribunal, and was answering accusations brought against him. They saw no one, but they heard distinctly what was said. "It is true," said the solitary,

"that I did commit that sin, but if I did, I fasted three years for it on bread and water... That is true, too; I acknowledge it, but I confessed it, and did penance for it. As for that other sin, I did not commit it, and you accuse me falsely... There, I have no excuse to offer I am guilty of that sin, but I throw myself on the mercy of God." Is not this sufficient to alarm us, my young friends, when we think of such a rigorous account being demanded of a solitary who had spent forty years in a desert? Which of us can flatter ourselves, after that, with having no reason to fear the judgements of God? Let us endeavour to live so that the devil shall have nothing wherewith to reproach us at the end of our lives, or at least that we may be able to answer him like this solitary - "It is true I committed that sin, but I did penance for it." - ST. JOHN CLIMACHUS, L'Echelle Sainte (Holy Ladder), VIIth degree.

132. The Dream of a Solitary. - "Remember your last end, and you will never sin," says the Holy Ghost. What proves the truth of this saying, my dear friends, is that when we reach the hour of death, we always repent of not having done as we ought. The following is one of a thousand instances of this kind. It is related by St. John Climachus himself. A hermit named Hesichus had retired to Mount Horeb (or Sinai), in Arabia a short distance from the great monastery of Saint Katherine's. (It is now regarded as part of the nation of Egypt.) Being unfaithful to his vocation, he led for many years a very disedifying life. In this sad state he was seized by a serious illness which soon reduced him to the last extremity. God even permitted him to fall into a species of lethargy, in which he was believed dead. Nevertheless, he failed not to return to life, and, without saying what he had undergone, begged to be left alone. He then built up the wall of his cell, and remained there for twelve whole years without seeing any one; a little bread and water was conveyed to him every day through a little window, and that was all his nourishment. He was almost always in tears, and never spoke to any one. When it was observed at the end of some twelve years, that he was going to die, the wall which blocked up the door of his cell was broken down, and some of the religious who had known him best, besought him to give them some words of exhortation before his death.

"Brethren," said he, in a feeble voice, "he who has the thought of death well engraved on his mind will never sin." And he expired; leaving all who wore present deeply impressed by what they had seen and heard. - ST. JOHN CLIMACHUS, Holy Ladder, VIIth degree.

133. The Judgement Painted by St. Methodius. - There is in the Turkey of the Ottoman Empire, a vast province which was formerly called Bulgaria, the inhabitants of which were only converted to Christianity in the ninth century under the promptings of Popes such as Saints Nicholas and Adrian III and Pope John VIII. (Happily this nation is now free from the tyranny of both the Turk and the Communist, but it still greatly needs our prayers for its full conversion and return to the unity of Saint Peter, which laboured so long for its conversion from paganism.) Amongst their apostles figured conspicuously a holy monk named Methodius, who was also a most skilful painter. One day Bogoris, king of the Bulgarians, - who had as yet refused to be converted, although leaving, his subjects at full liberty - requested St. Methodius to paint some pictures for him to ornament a palace which he had just constructed. The King recommended to him, amongst other things, to choose a subject, the representation of which would freeze with terror all who beheld it. The saint, in conformity with the king's directions, undertook to paint the Last Judgement. In his painting was seen Jesus Christ surrounded by angels, seated on a throne of dazzling glory, and clothed in the terrors of an angry judge. All men, without distinction of age or rank, were assembled before His tribunal, where they awaited trembling the sentence that was to decide their eternal fate. There was, moreover, in the several parts of the picture, a force, an energy, a vivacity, a warmth of expression, that added still more to the horror of the subject. The work, being finished, was shown to the king,

who was deeply moved by the sight of it ; but his emotion increased much more when the painter explained to him each of the parts whereof the picture was composed. He could no longer remain obdurate, and corresponding thenceforward with the grace which spoke to him through a sensible object, he asked to be instructed in the mysteries of religion, and a short time after received baptism. Such was the effect of a mere painting of the Last Judgement; what shall it be, then, my dear friends, when we come to be present in reality at those formidable assizes? - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist., I., 263.

134. St. Philip Neri's "What Then?" - People are wont to busy themselves a great deal about their future, that is to say, about making a position for themselves in the world, and choosing a state that will best ensure their success in life; unhappily, they do not always think enough of the true future, which is eternal. A young man named Spazzara, who lived in Rome in the sixteenth century, went one day to St. Philip Neri, and entered into long details about the study of law, which he had just commenced. He described the course which he meant to pursue in order to obtain the degree of doctor. "And then - ?" demanded the Saint. "Then," replied the young man, much encouraged, "I will plead causes, and I hope successfully." "And then - ?" added the Saint, again. "And then, people will begin to speak of me, and I shall enjoy a reputation." "And then - ?" continued St. Philip Neri, smiling. "And then" - answered the young man, a little embarrassed, "and then - oh! I shall live at my ease, and I shall be happy." "And what then - ?" "Well! then, - I shall end by dying." "And then," resumed the Saint, raising his voice, "and then, what shall you do when your own trial comes, when you shall be yourself the accused, Satan the accuser, and the Almighty God your judge?" The young man, who little expected such a conclusion, hung his head and began to consider within himself. A short time after, he renounced the study of law, and endeavoured, by consecrating his life to the service of God, to prepare seriously for that final, what then? that is to say, that awful judgement, which shall be followed by eternity. Let us do the same, my dear young friends, and we shall never repent of it. - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist. III., 530.

135. A Temple Built at Cairo, by Assan. - Speaking of the Last Judgement, children, I have a very singular, and yet a very touching story to tell you. You know that when we leave this world, we take nothing with us : dignities, riches, lands, houses, all is left at the door of the tomb; nothing remains with us but our good or bad actions. Hear now my story. It took place in the seventeenth century. There was in Cairo, the capital of Egypt, a Turkish governor named Assan, who was distinguished by his avarice, and still more by his cunning. It was his desire to be spoken of throughout the world, no matter in what way. One day he took it into his head to have it proclaimed in every country, that he had the intention of building a magnificent temple to the true God, and that all persons who should come to Cairo to see him, on such a day, should receive from his hand some very acceptable present, and that without distinction of Moslems (or Mohammedans as the followers of Islam are sometimes incorrectly called), Christians, Jews, or idolaters. No sooner had the appointed day come, than there arrived at Cairo an innumerable multitude of travellers, pilgrims, and others, each and all eager to receive a share of Assan's bounty. They were all assembled in a vast court, and thence conducted into one still larger, but which they could only enter one by one through a very narrow passage. Accordingly as they entered this narrow passage, each one was stripped of his clothes, and clad in a new robe and tunic, under pretence of honouring him the more. All the old clothes thus taken off were heaped in one place, and set fire to. What was the result? When they were all reduced to ashes, there was found in the furnace an enormous quantity of gold and silver, because it is the custom, in those countries, for travellers to sew their money in their girdle, or in a fold of their robe. Assan, well aware of this custom, took the means I have just related to possess

himself of all those treasures. You laugh at this scurvy trick, and yet you feel indignant; you say: none but a greedy Turk would think of such a thing. But let us not forget, my young friends, that we, too, shall one day traverse, one by one, the narrow passage that leads from life to death, from time to eternity, and that we shall take nothing with us except our good or bad qualities. Let us think of this often, and prepare for it well. - NOEL, Cat. de Rodez, II., 345.

136. Yes, yes, I will Confess. - O my friends, but the judgements of God are terrible! People sometimes say, "at my death, I will be converted," yet God permits that they die in impenitence and despair. If you know a little book entitled The 'New' Think Well On It, you may read, at page 98, the following story which is well adapted to make us reflect. A fisherman, whose name I dare not tell, had passed his life in the most disorderly and vicious habits; having fallen dangerously ill, a virtuous priest who took a charitable interest in him, came to see him, and urged him to think of his soul's salvation. The sick man made no answer. The minister of the Lord represents to him his perilous condition, and exhorts him to confess. "Yes, yes, father, I will go to confession in the course of a little time." The priest, animated by a holy zeal, urges him still more strongly. The fisherman replies: "Well, come to-morrow, and I will make my confession." On the morrow the priest returns. When he is alone with the sick man, he makes the sign of the cross, and tells him to begin his confession. The latter remains some time silent; all at once, in a terrific tone, the good priest pronounces those awful words of Scripture: "The sinner shall open his eyes and be wroth." At that moment the sick man buries his head in the bed, covers his face, and is silent. The confessor uncovers him. "I would advise you," he said, "to go on at once with your confession; this is no time for delay." "Yes, yes, father, I will confess," said he, but then he remained obstinately silent. Seemingly inspired the priest, in an effort to shake the fisherman out of his complacency, continued the terrible text - "The sinner shall gnash his teeth, and tremble with rage." But again the sick man hides his face in the bed-clothes. The confessor once more uncovers him, and with tears beseeches him to think of his confession. "Yes, yes, father, let us go on, let us go on," and, for the third time, with a look of mortal terror, he buries his head still further. Amazingly, as if from some source outside of himself, the sick man began finishing those last words: "The desires of the wicked shall perish with them." The confessor, more and more alarmed, uncovers him again; alas! the wretch was dead! - BAUDRAND, L'Ame Penitente, (The Penitent Soul,) or, The 'New' Think Well On It, 98.
