

The Particular or Personal Judgement

Christian teaching says that **men have become mortal as a result of the ancestral sin**, but also that **God has redeemed us from death through the sacrifice of His Son**. The resurrection of Our Lord has shown that death can be defeated by faith in the Son of God and the fulfillment of the Divine Will. He Himself says that he who believes in Him “*though he may die, he shall live*” (John 11:25). That is why we Christians know that **death is only of the body, the soul never dies**; it only separates itself from this world and from all its pleasures and pains entering into eternal life.

After death, man personally encounters God, Who submits him to **Private or Personal Judgment**. The **Judge, Our Lord Jesus Christ**, will then decide for every soul its place for eternity (eternal happiness or eternal torment), according to his faith and deeds during his earthly life, how virtuous or sinful he has lived on Earth. At the judgment after death, **all the deeds of a person, both good and bad (God knows them all!) will be put into the impartial balance of God's justice**.

The Orthodox Church teaches us that when a man dies, **his soul separates from the body** and begins its **journey of ascension to Heaven, towards the Divine Throne where it will be judged**. This journey takes several days, during which the body is buried in the ground where it begins to decompose into Earth elements from which it was created by God at the beginning of the world. From this earth the **human body will be resurrected by God at the end of the world**, before the second coming of the Lord, and before the **Last or Universal Judgment** - of all men and devils.

During its journey after death, the soul is **met by the devils** whom he has served through passions or by the **guardian angel** with whom he collaborated in his life through virtues and good deeds; the devils **will try to stop him on the way, reminding him the evil deeds of his life and frightening him that he will not escape the eternal torments**, while **the angel will encourage him, reminding him the good deeds, repentance and hope in God**. This is also called the teaching about the “**Aerial Toll-Houses**”. Man remembers in this way all his life, even the things he has forgotten, and he realizes what mistakes / good deeds he has done and did not even know until then.

Forty days after death, every soul is presented before the Divine Throne to the Personal Judgment, where it **will be asked about everything he has done** (the *book of his life* will be opened and read) and will have witnesses, accusers and defenders.

- Witness: own consciousness – each person will know in his heart what he has done well (conscience will be calm) and what has done wrong (it will feel guilty, culpable), and will himself confess his deeds at the judgment before God;
- Defenders / advocates: the guardian angel and the saints whom the man honored in his lifetime – will defend the soul in front of God from the accusations that the devils will bring, showing the reasons / excuses why he has done evil so that he can be judged leniently / forgiven by the Judge, or the good deeds and the repentance through which he tried to repair the evil done;
 - **Church on Earth - Christians still alive** that **pray** for him through memorial services and almsgiving, for God to forgive and be merciful to him.
- Accusers / prosecutors: the devils – **will blame** man for all the wrongs / sins made and not repented, and will demand rights of dominion over him and that man should receive punishment in eternal torments.

Through his conscience, **the sinful man** will have to respond in front of God for all the bad thoughts, words and deeds he has done and for which he has not repented, for all the gifts He has received from Him, and not has used them (multiplied by personal effort) in order to spread love around him, and all the good they could have done and did not do. To them the **Judgment will be very painful**, they will see how much they have sinned being disobedient and wicked, and will not be able to excuse themselves before Him. God's answer to them will be: “*I do not know you!*” and they'll be cast away in hell.

For the **faithful / saint** who, during his life, has endeavored to do good (he cared for his salvation), who has repented and always asked for God's mercy, forgiveness and help when he has sinned, who lived in peace with all men, and who

has always been grateful for the gifts received from Him, using them to multiply the love around him, God's judgment will be more **like a feast, like a crowning / rewarding ceremony**, after Jesus' promise: *"Those who judge themselves, shall not come into judgment, but will pass from death into Life."*

For **most of the people** who **have done both good and bad** during their lives, God **will put in balance the good thoughts, words and deeds on the one side and the evil ones on the other**; depending on which part the balance will lean, that will be his sentence: a reward of Heaven or punishment in Hell (see the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus), in varying degrees, according to his deeds. For those saved in this way, **the judgment will be "through fire", painful**, as a purification passing through the fire.

Personal Judgement has the following **characteristics**:

- **Particular** – **each person is judged personally, separately, for what he did for himself** (if he took his life seriously and cared for his salvation or not) **and for others** (whether he has helped spread goodness in the world by loving others or he has hurt the people around him).
- **Secret** – **known only by the soul of the judged man and God**, plus his accusers and witnesses (angels, interceding saints; it is very rare for God to reveal to His saints the state of another man's soul after death).
- **Righteous** – **correct, "what goes around, comes around"**, according to the divine promise that *"what measure you will measure with, same measure shall be used unto you"*; if it turns out that man was forgiving in his life, many of his sins will be forgiven, otherwise they won't; if he had mercy on others, he would receive God's mercy, otherwise he won't (see the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant); if he trusted God and fulfilled His commandments, he would receive the reward of being called the son of God, otherwise he would be banished as an enemy; if he was disadvantaged in life through various things (e.g. poverty, lack of education, illness, etc.) due to other people's fault, God will take this into account and will judge him leniently; but He will judge without tolerance if the man could have overcome these disadvantages and did not do it, being overwhelmed with laziness and discouragement instead (see the Parable of the Talents); etc.
- **Temporary** – **the sentence / reward in Heaven or punishment in Hell is temporary**, valid until the time of the Last Judgement, when **the state of the soul will worsen or ease according to the consequences of its actions** on his descendants (after death), or the forgiveness / unforgiveness given by other people.

Hell and **Heaven** are two spiritual states, but also places / spaces.

In Hell, the souls of men will stay in suffering / regret and sorrow, trembling with the fear of eternal punishment that can come after the Last Judgment. In there, souls always want and ask for help from the saints and from those who are still alive, for the relief of their condition until the Last Judgment.

In Heaven, the souls of men will rest, after the sufferings and effort made for salvation, waiting for eternal happiness after the Last Judgment.

Teachings:

- After death, we will all be brought to the Judgment of God;
- We should always take care of our salvation by doing good deeds;
- When we realize we did something wrong, we should ask for forgiveness and straighten our ways immediately, because we do not know when we'll die and will be brought to judgement; Let us always be ready for judgment;
- Let us pray as often as possible *"for a good defense before the awesome judgment seat of Christ"* – as we say at the Divine Liturgy; even from now we can make God benevolent towards us;
- Let us make friends with the saints so they will intercede for us at the judgment;
- Let us live in peace with all people and love them; those who love us will pray for us after we die;
- Let us pray for those who fell asleep, so that God may be merciful towards us at the judgment like we have prayed for those who have come to judgment before us;
- After he dies, man cannot do anything for his salvation, but can only hope for the mercy of his fellows and of God.