

The End! (Lord's Day 19 Q&A 52)

Readings: Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15

The Question & Answer of our Catechism we deal with today revolves around the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Return...Christ has not left us *for good*...Rather, He will *return*.

But see: the Apostle's Creed –and therefore the Catechism-
does not simply confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is *coming back*;
the Creeds mention that He's coming back *as Judge*.

That's fully Scriptural;

Peter in his talk with Cornelius proclaimed that God has ordained Jesus to be "Judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42)...

in other words, of *all* people, without exception.

Judge: people of every tribe and race, rich and poor, good and evil, *you and me*, will appear before Christ's *judgment* seat, and the Judge will separate the sheep from the goats, He will send some this way and some that way.

Judge. We feel there's something negative, something threatening in the notion of judgment.

We sense in the word **judge** a negative connotation, in terms of, here's a warning,
Christ comes as judge, so we have to make a point of being ready.

And it's true, we do need to make a point of being ready for the day that our Lord comes back.

Yet the intriguing thing is that when the church in Lord's Day 19 asks the about the significance of that statement in the Apostles' Creed –that He comes to judge the living and the dead–, the church puts the whole matter in the context of comfort.

That's question 52, "What comfort is it to you that Christ will come to judge the living and the dead?"

In the answer is that in the midst of life's sorrow and persecution, and all the injustices that characterize this life – the comfort that Christ when He returns will set straight all the brokenness, the crookedness and injustices of this life it brings comfort! So we can leave the injustices to Him...and we can get on with doing our tasks.

As we look at what the catechism says we need to look, briefly at 3 things:

1. The need for this comfort,

2. The nature of this comfort,
3. The outcome of this comfort.
- 4.

1. The need for this comfort.

From the moment of the fall into sin in the beginning, human life has been characterized by strife and struggle.

God announced to the serpent back in Genesis 3 that He would place "enmity" between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

Enmity: that's hatred, war, strife.

The *devil* against the children of God.

The last book of the Bible repeats that theme.

In Revelation 12, when the devil was not able to destroy the seed of the woman, in rage, he comes to make war against us on earth.

He is out to destroy the church, to destroy us.

Whether the Christian sees the anger of the devil is one thing; *God Himself* has told us of the fact that the devil is enraged and God's people are the target of his hellish fury.

The devil can express that wrath in very subtle forms or in very blatant forms, but it's real either way.

In our Lord's Day the Catechism gives expression to this reality with the opening words of A 52. The Catechism speaks there of "all my sorrows and persecution."

We read the word 'persecution', and our thoughts go to what the believers in, say, China experience;

they are imprisoned on account of the faith, beaten and abused, and perhaps killed for the testimony of Jesus.

We compare that to our circumstances, and feel that this term in our Catechism is somewhat too strong with regards to us.

Now it is certainly true that we in Australia today do not face the persecution so many other believers face elsewhere.

But that takes nothing away from the intensity of the devil's hatred of the church in Dandenong, hatred of you and me.

He's just crafty enough to package his hatred in less open, more subtle forms.

We are not physically persecuted today on account of the faith.

But the devil's hatred comes at us in more subtle ways.

Perhaps we experience hurt from brothers of one faith.

Perhaps we feel no care from the communion of saints.

Perhaps loved ones have shunned us

and we're alone, all alone, and no one seems to understand.

Perhaps we find ourselves repeatedly teased at school (Christian school!),
or even regularly insulted by our classmates.

Perhaps, to say it with Jesus' words in His parable in Mt 25:

we're hungry or thirsty and nobody gives us food or a drink;

we feel like a stranger, lonely, and nobody takes us in;

we feel naked and exposed, and nobody clothes or protects us;

we're sick or imprisoned, and nobody visits us.

What should be an environment of peace and love (church, home, school) can be so very disappointing.

Life knows so many sorrows, persecutions....

Then what?

We need comfort, we need encouragement, we need perspective.

What comfort there is?

Instant justice, instant relief?

Paul knew better and told the Thessalonians that God will repay at His time those who hurt His children now – when Christ comes back.

Here's the instruction of our Lord's Day.

Ever since the fall into sin this life knows so much sorrow and persecution.

In the midst of that sorrow and persecution,

with its accompanying injustice and victimization, what do I do?

The Catechism catches the instruction of Scripture with these words: "in all my sorrow and persecution I lift up my head and eagerly await [the] judge from heaven."

Get despondent, heart-broken and weary in the face of the troubles and wrongs of this life?

Take matters in my own hand and insist on righting all the wrongs (to my satisfaction)?

No, says the Catechism: lift up your head!

Look up, for *there* you find hope and justice!

God, *God* will send the Judge at His time,
and that Judge will judge the living and the dead,
will judge all people,
will judge also between you and your neighbor.

Here is our need for comfort...God will judge.

...but what about the nature of that comfort?

That the Lord Jesus Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead is indeed a great comfort for those children God who are afflicted in this world.

As we think of the neighbour and the injustices that he has done to us,
what he's said and even thought about us,
we find some comfort in God's promise about judgement.

There is something encouraging in that promise, because the person who has done us wrong will receive their just reward, and that feels good....

But you know when the scriptures say that every deed, every word, every thought will be laid open before Christ on the day of judgment, the Scriptures are not speaking only of the neighbour's deeds, words and thoughts;
*the Scriptures are speaking of **my** deeds, and **my** words and thoughts also!*

I read in the Bible that on the Day of Judgment the books will be opened (Rev 20:12) and God will bring up everything I've ever done.

Now, suddenly the idea of Christ's return and His judgment has a different flavour.

That **I** have to appear before Him. What am I going to say to God?!
Shall I tell Him of all the evil my neighbour has done to me?
Shall I tell Him of all the nasty words he spoke to me?
Shall I tell the Lord all what I read behind the man's words and deeds,
what his thoughts were, what I think his motives were?

We realize: when **I** have to appear before the judgment seat of God,
God isn't going to ask me what **you** did,
he is going to ask me what **I** did,
and **I** have to give account of **my** sinful deeds and words and thoughts.
And then, what sins do I have to confess?

Perhaps I have to confess sins where I hurt somebody, for I've undoubtedly done that.
I'll have to give account of my deeds and words and thoughts, everyone without exception.

But you know, congregation, I shall also have to give account for **how I responded** to the wrong things you did to me, said to me.

How I **respond**, that is what I am responsible for, and I have to give account to God for my bitterness, I have to give account to God for the anger tucked away inside.

More, I shall have to give account to God too for my unwillingness to leave crookedness for God to set straight.

I shall have to give account to God for all my efforts of trying to make this life perfect.

Then I realize, it is not just my neighbour who can't stand before Christ's judgment seat, but **I can't either**.

Where is the comfort in knowing we too will be Judged?

Look at what the Catechism says: who is the judge that is coming?

How is he described?

He is not a cold and detached somebody,

but the judge that's coming from heaven is the very same person who before, back on Good Friday, has submitted Himself to the judgment of God for my sake, and has removed all the curse from me!

Good Friday, **He** took my sins upon Himself, and He paid for those sins!

Such was His love for me!

Well, if on Good Friday He took my sins upon Himself, and He in love paid for them,

is He on the last day going to be angry with me?!

Didn't He take my sins away? So there is no sin left!

That is also what I can say to my God when I have to appear before him.

I have to give account of all my deeds, words and thoughts.

What shall I say?

Shall I not say: but Lord, didn't You pay for my sins?

And the answer is, **YES!**

There was mercy for me on Good Friday, and therefore there will be mercy for me on the Last Day.

There was mercy for my brother on Good Friday, and so there will be mercy for my brother on the Last Day too!

What, then, is the nature of my comfort?

Is it this, that my enemy will receive his just reward while I am vindicated?
No, that's not the fine point of my comfort – simply because I'm too aware of my own sinfulness.

The nature of my comfort is rather *the identity of the Judge*.

That Judge has laid down His life for me,
He *loves* me, has shown great *compassion* for me,
and He won't change!

So, if *the merciful Savior of Good Friday* is to judge me,
then I can look forward eagerly to that Great Day – for He will not condemn me.

Yes, all my evil deeds will come up, and I will have to give account of every idle word I've spoken, and I'll have to justify all my thoughts and their motives – and I know well that I *can't*.

But I believe that I can plead with the Judge on the basis of *His own sacrifice on Calvary for me*, and remind Him that He took on Himself the curse which I deserved.

The identity of the Judge: that's my comfort.

Now yet our last point,

3. The outcome of this comfort.

How shall we respond to all of this?

If justice is Christ's department, if justice is something that Christ does at **His** time, when He comes again to judge the living and the dead, is it for us to fix up, to straighten out everything that is crooked in this life?

Hear me well: if someone does me wrong, and in so doing breaks the law of the land,

I go to the authorities of the land.

Again, if my brother sins against me, I go to him according to Matthew 18.

That is God's way of dealing with a sinner and encouraging repentance.

If you are wronged in church there is place for appealing to major assemblies.

But, **Christ** is the final judge!

If then things do not pan out in society, in family, in church to personal satisfaction,

there comes a point where you leave it,

you leave it on the conviction that Christ will sort it out at His time.

Why be over righteous and destroy yourself?

What do you gain by that?

On top of that, in all the brokenness of this life it is not just the other who has done wrong,
I have too, and we all must say that – and not just in words.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is coming back to judge the living and the dead

When Christ comes back, and then those who have done evil will go this way, and those who
have done good will go that way,
unbelievers to hell eternal, believers to life eternal with the Lord.

And who will be there then?

You know, it will not be only your friends;
it can also be people you have hurt, and people who have hurt you.

But for them there can be forgiveness, just as there is forgiveness for **you**.

Well, if there is room in the New Jerusalem for all of God's people,
including my sinful brother who has hurt me,
and there is even room for **me** who hurt the other;

if we can be together in the New Jerusalem,
is it not imperative that we strive to be together **now** already?

If **on that day** there shall be no negative feelings, no distance, no one on the outer,
there **may not be today either**.

Here we need to be least, here already reconciled wherever we have broken a relationship.

And No, it will not do to wait for the other to make the first move.
Be the least, reach out, and don't insist on your own rights!

Injustice? This life is characterized by injustice.

At the end of the day we have to leave injustices to our God,
and He sends His Son to judge the living and the dead.

He comes, He comes and then, all our sins will be shown to be covered in the blood of one
Saviour.

Isn't that a glorious gospel?

Amen.

