

The topic of today's readings is one that many people find fascinating, at least it would seem that way judging by the number of movies, books and TV programs that make mention of it, and that topic of course is the end times, or the end of the world. Clearly, many people can't resist speculating on it. Apparently, some people think it might even happen in the year 2012, because there is even a movie out about it. And yet as interesting of a subject as this may be, it is also just as interesting that many people at the same time really don't like to stop and consider their own mortality. To think about the end of the world is one thing, but to think about the end of your life is another. It is a strange dichotomy. But when we discuss the end times, it is important for us to realize that first of all, no one knows when that will be. And in reality, does it really matter when? Because, none of us knows when our last day on earth will be. It could happen to anyone of us tomorrow or 50 years from now, we just don't know. And so as a result, we all have to be prepared now for the day we die, because the day we die is for all practical purposes, the end of the world for us. This is not something that we can take lightly because the readings indicate to us that even though the world may end, we don't. There is life after death. There is a heaven and a hell. And when our lives are over, we will be judged.

Whenever this subject is brought up, the thing that I find that many people struggle with is this concept of heaven and hell. Many think, "How can a good and loving God send anyone to hell?" And not only that but, you also see all these images of heaven and hell, you know, like a devil with a pitchfork and flames of fire, and an angel with a harp on top of a cloud, and as a result, many times these images have an effect of obscuring and trivializing this whole topic of life and death. Consequently, many people just don't buy it to begin with. So what we need to realize is this: First of all, put away those images of heaven and hell for a moment, because to put it simply, Heaven is being in the presence of God and His love for all eternity, which is a wonderful thing. Hell is the absence of God for all eternity, which is a horrible thing. Secondly, God wants everyone to be in heaven. That is why he sent his Son into the world, that is why Jesus sacrificed everything, even his own life, so as to save us, so that we could all be in heaven with him. That is how much He loves us.

But, because he loves us that much, God wants us of course to love him back with that same kind of love. And so in order for us to love with that kind of love, that means that we first must have a choice. I always tell the couples that I prepare for marriage that love is a choice, it is a decision, it is not merely a feeling. When you choose to do what is good and right for another person despite how you feel, that is love. And so therefore, God is asking us to choose him, just as God has given himself completely over to us and chosen us, as is evidenced by Jesus suffering and dying for us. God is hoping that we will demonstrate that kind of love for Him. It is that deepest sense of love that God is asking us to participate in with Him. And this is where heaven and hell come in. Because it is not about devils with pitchforks and angels with harps ok. Heaven and hell is about choosing God or not choosing God. These are our two choices. It is

not so much that God sends anyone to hell as it is that people choose hell, and they choose it by choosing to exclude God from their lives. Remember, hell is the absence of God, and heaven is being in the presence of God.

As I know I have said before, God doesn't force himself on us, he has given us free will, and he allows us to choose whether or not we will make him the center of our lives, or if we will make something else the center of our lives. And God will honor that decision, but if we choose something else to be the center of our lives, if we say that there is something in my life that is more important to me than God, then effectively we are not choosing heaven. We are excluding God to the degree that we favor something else.

This is why Jesus was so harsh on those who are lukewarm. Jesus wasn't lukewarm about us, he loves us to the point of dying for us. To be lukewarm is to be indifferent, and that isn't love. If you think about it, if you show great love towards another person, and they simply turn around and show indifference towards you, you would be insulted and hurt. And that is what we do to God when we are indifferent to Him. This is why the commandment to love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength is so important for us. If we don't do this, we are choosing something else ahead of God.

Therefore, this is what we need to consider when we think about how we structure our lives and plan the time that we spend, and the activities that we participate in. I mean, if we are not going to church and were not praying, aren't we really saying, God you're not worth my time? I'm not saying that we have to spend every waking moment in the chapel, God does expect us to get on with our lives, but there are definitely ways to go about structuring our lives so that God is clearly the central focus. And it is up to you to be honest enough with yourself to figure that out, to ask yourselves, is God really #1 in my life, or do other things take precedence? And what more can I do to make sure that I am truly showing love for God in my life? When it comes to the end times, forget the sensationalism of it all, this is what it is all about, whether or not we will accept God's invitation of love and make Him the center of our life, or will we foolishly reject it. The choice is ours.

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