

- How often do you think about Heaven?
- Is Heaven something that you ardently desire and long for with all your heart? Is it a regular thought? Or, is Heaven something that rarely crosses your mind, occupied as you are with worldly matters?
- Do you presume that, because in your own estimation you're a "good" person, you'll naturally attain Heaven when you die?
- Or, are you diligent in trying to prepare yourself for your judgment, when you'll come face to face with our Lord and have to account for all the actions of your life?
- Once again this Sunday, our Lord regales us with parables about the Kingdom of Heaven that, for the uninitiated, might be difficult to comprehend.
- Yet, Jesus uses these parables to explain to us the supreme value of the Kingdom of Heaven. Heaven *is* the treasure buried in a field, it *is* the pearl of great price – worth whatever we must give to attain it.
- Yet, it's interesting to note that our Gospel also contains an apocalyptic threat.
- In telling us that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, a net that catches fish both good and bad, we hear that that the bad will be separated and thrown away into "the fiery furnace where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth."
- Understand that our Lord tends to underscore repeatedly the truth about judgment and damnation not because He's mean and trying to scare us. He does so because of man's propensity to forget these truths!
- In other words, our Lord wants us to be ever conscious of the fact that there are consequences for our sins, and these He would like to spare us.
- The Gospels show us that there were times when Jesus was moved to anger because of the sinfulness he encountered. There were times in which He spoke harsh words in warning to those who refused His gentle yoke.
- This is why we must be intent upon seeking His will and living as He would have us live.
- And rather than living with a servile fear of hell, we should simply look at God and all the many blessings He bestows upon us, and then set about ordering our lives in a way that is pleasing to Him.
- My dear brothers and sisters, do you understand how much our Lord loves you? Do you realize the great gift of grace it is to be not only alive and well, but to be Catholic?
- Are you not amazed that in His goodness, God is willing to pardon even the worst and most wicked of sins if only we repent of it, so great is His desire to save us?
- It's astounding really – and the only proper response is to live our lives in gratitude to God for His many gifts.
- To be sure, our lives will be much more joyful if we order them out of gratitude, rather than allowing them to be ruled by fear. And so we must constantly show our gratitude to God for His blessings, His grace, and His mercy toward us.
- While there are many ways to show our gratitude to God, especially by being generous with time, talent, and treasure, the most important way to show our gratitude to God is by being generous with our hearts by truly loving God and neighbor.
- As your pastor, of course I want you to give generously of your money. Of course, I want you to volunteer your time. But more than anything, I want you to love.

- Loving God means being quick to obey Him and His Church's teachings with joy, trusting that following His commandments and doing His will is the very best thing that can ever happen to us.
- At the same time, we must also be willing to share the truth of our Catholic faith, so that others might come to know God more fully and love Him more truly.
- While the best way to share our faith is by living it joyfully and with integrity, there comes a time in every Catholic's life that we must be able to articulate the teachings of the Church to those who are ignorant of the Faith. So, we must know our faith!
- Of course, the primary teaching authority of the Church resides with the bishops. As successors of the apostles, they are entrusted with the mission of passing down the Faith, and of correctly interpreting the Church's teachings in accord with Tradition.
- In this regard, we are living in a rather precarious time, aren't we? While we have a very good and faithful bishop here, that's not the case everywhere.
- It's becoming ever more evident, especially with the upcoming "Synod on Synodality," that there are some amongst the Church's hierarchy who are intent upon changing the Church's teachings – especially with regard to sexual morality.
- But understand this: the treasure of our Catholic Tradition is so perfectly rich that it can provide instruction that applies to all ages, societal contexts, and situations.
- So, it is the Church who should be enlightening all ages, societies, and situations – not the other way around. The Church's teachings should not change just because the world has changed, which is what so many Church leaders are saying.
- Thus, it is the sacred duty of Church leaders to preach not new things, but the unchanging truths of our Catholic Faith. Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and His teachings are the same yesterday, today, and forever.
- Furthermore, if any Church leader teaches something that contradicts the authentic teachings of the Church, he must be resisted, no matter what his position is – even pope.
- I say this not to unjustly judge any member of the Church's hierarchy, but to protect you, who are my flock! And I fear that if Jesus were here today, He might treat many of the Church's hierarchy like He treated the Temple money changers.
- Yet, with that being said, we should never lose heart – or faith. The Church has been through times like this before, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, She always self-corrects and Her orthodoxy always wins out in time.
- Our job, as faithful followers of Christ, is to remain steadfast in our faith, hope, and charity – while keeping our eyes on Heaven, seeing Heaven as the great goal of our lives.
- And when we keep our eyes firmly on Heaven, longing for it with all our hearts, the trials and tribulations of earthly life become not only less nettlesome, but even sweet.
- Brothers and sisters, let us earnestly pray for all Church leaders, that they may be faithful and upright men intent upon our Lord's will. As well, let us pray for the conversion of the proud wolves among them, that they may, by God's grace, become humble sheep and good shepherds.
- And let us love God and neighbor well, keeping our minds and hearts focused on Heaven, and the rewards that are promised to those who love and serve God well here on earth.