

- The very first time I walked into the Sistine Chapel in Rome, my jaw dropped. Through the genius of Michelangelo, the artwork of this chapel is a masterpiece of Italian Renaissance art that thrills the senses and the soul. It's truly an awesome sight.
- On the ceiling, of course, are the frescoes from the Book of Genesis that Michelangelo painted from 1508-1512, while on the altar wall is Michelangelo's famous fresco of *The Last Judgment*, which he painted between 1536 and 1541.
- Every time I go there, there's no shortage of people looking up and clicking pictures of Michelangelo's art. Yet I always wonder: how many of these people really take to heart what these frescoes are trying to convey?
- Are they casually admiring the beauty of the artwork, or are they moved to repentance for their sins and a greater love and respect for our Lord, as the artist intended?
- Do they appreciate the art for its significance and allow it to penetrate them, or do they greedily and thoughtlessly consume it without any lasting impact to their soul?
- Last Sunday I spoke about the balancing act we Christians must strive to maintain as we consider Christ's almighty power. We must fear the Lord with a filial fear, yet also love Him with confidence that His mercy will pardon our sins if we're truly repentant.
- What I love about Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* scene in the Sistine Chapel is that, while it reminds you of God's terrifying justice, you also get a sense of the fantastic glory that awaits those who are saved. It strikes that balance.
- If we allow it, beholding the awesome art of the Sistine Chapel can put the fear of God in us, but also make our souls thrill with the prospect of eternal salvation and the glory we'll share with our Lord and the Saints. But we must look at it with attentiveness.
- Today we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King. Our readings and prayers remind us of this glory and power of God that we will all one day behold with faces unveiled.
- Whether we like it or not, God is our supreme end. He has made us for Himself, and no matter who we are, we must face His judgment at the end of our lives.
- In calling to mind this thrilling yet terrifying truth, Holy Mother Church is giving us a reality check. She's telling us to pay attention and prepare for what awaits, rather than bumbling through life like feckless tourists more intent on getting good pics for their Instagram account than really taking in and understanding the meaning of the beautiful art they've just beheld.
- And so, we must stop and reflect on our lives and how we're living them, rather than just blithely sliding through life with little thought of the consequences of our actions.
- To put it bluntly, we must choose whether we wish to share in God's glory for all eternity by living our lives in conformity to His will, or to reject that glorious eternity by selfishly living for ourselves – by our own will. We either choose for God, or against Him.
- We choose for God by exercising the virtue of faith, choosing to believe in God and all that the Church teaches about the magnificent mysteries of our Catholic Faith!
- But God wants us to do more than just believe in Him. He wants us to put down our iPhones and iPads occasionally and think of Him with true devotion and a desire to know Him!
- What God desires from us is our time and attention; He desires that we know Him. So often we treat God as if He's a heavenly Santa Claus or a divine yet disinterested potentate.

- But in reality, He is our sovereign and omnipotent Lord, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. He made us and holds us in being, and He will judge us according to how well we loved Him and heeded His commands.
- Yet, as sobering as this thought is, we also know that God cannot resist our pleas for His mercy. Think of the Gospel story of the good thief. A humble recognition of one's sins, coupled with a plea for mercy even at the end of one's life, is enough to save the worst of sinners!
- So, while He is all-powerful, our Lord is also loving and ever so desirous of our salvation. He wants us to be among the saints in glory! And so, Jesus wields these two divine attributes: His omnipotence and His mercy, a carrot and a stick, in order to bring us to salvation.
- It is by His mercy that our Lord desires to save us and lead us to Heaven, and it's by His omnipotence that He has overcome the obstacles to our salvation: sin and death.
- By His omnipotence we are subject to Him whether we like it or not. It is by His omnipotence that He has the power to judge all things.
- Yet it is by His mercy we may obtain our salvation, that we are covered by His Precious Blood – but only if we repent of our sins, for there can be no mercy without repentance.
- But there can be no repentance without reflection on our part. If we're truly going to repent of our sins, we must first acknowledge them and their seriousness. We must give consideration to how we've offended God and others. But this requires that we reflect.
- It requires that we make room for silence in our lives, and make time for prayer.
- In one week's time we will enter into Advent, the penitential and yet hopeful season that prepares us for the joys of Christmas, but that also reminds us of the ultimate realities we must face when Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead.
- Yet in our secular society, we are already full-blown into the "Holiday Season," a time of excess and indulgence that, for most of us, is overly busy and not at all conducive to prayer and reflection. My plea to you today is to fight being swept into the madness of it all.
- Focus on being a Christian rather than a consumer this Advent. Focus on being a believer rather than just a buyer of things. While it's a good thing to celebrate and spend time with loved ones in Advent, do not neglect spending time with our Lord.
- By all means you should give gifts and decorate your homes, but do not fail to make a gift of yourself to God by being present to Him in prayer and by decorating your soul with virtue.
- Instead of living your life on your phone or tablet, turn off your media or at least limit your usage. Do not allow societal pressures to dictate your life this time of year, but rather seek simply to please God and to do good to others, as our Gospel encourages us to do.
- Rather than thoughtlessly racing to Christmas distracted by worldly pleasures, take the time to reflect upon the great mysteries of Advent that are about to unfold before us. Make time for God, Who made you, sustains you in being, and will ultimately save you if you let Him.
- My brothers and sisters, for the sake of your soul, do not go through these next few weeks before Christmas like a thoughtless tourist focused only on getting a good pic rather than truly appreciating the beauty that is before him. Engage with God rather than secular society.
- There is so much awesome beauty in our Catholic Faith for us to behold: beauty that can shape and transform us if we let it.
- So, let's not live as thoughtless pagans do, but rather as true Christians who love and fear Christ the King, and who hope to live eternally with Him in Heaven.