

## **“Listen and live, or judge yourself and die!” John 5:21-29**

**“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”**

Now we get to look at today’s Gospel reading. I’ve been waiting for this moment the whole week. This is such a beautiful and clear message. I am concern only about one thing, that I can’t possibly put in words the beauty, the majesty, the comfort and the joy that today’s Gospel brings to us.

Let’s pray for the help of the Holy Spirit, to enlighten us and to bring into our hearts the richness of Jesus’ words, so we can truly rejoice in them.

**“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.”** This is what Jesus says about Himself, as about the Son of God. We know well that we have no control over life and death.

There is only one, who is the source of life, and that is God the Creator Himself. But here Jesus says that He, true man and true God also has the power to give life to whom He will. He, the One who gave up His life to save you from death, He has this power to raise you from dead and to give life to you.

What a joy to know it! If we don’t know God, then we can only speculate what His attitude towards us is, especially when life doesn’t go as we would hope. But as we know true God through His Son Jesus Christ, we are assured, as assured as we can be, that we will have eternal life.

If Jesus showed that He would do for us anything, even sacrifice His own life, now when He is risen and have receive from the Father all authority, you can be sure that He will raise you, will give life to you and will bring you in His Kingdom.

**“The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.”** This is another reason to rejoice. In whose hands is our eternal fate? Yes, in hands of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

What does this mean for us? As Jesus Himself said, all judgment is now given into His hands. So what? Can you be sure about what is going to happen with you, when you will stand before God's throne of glory, and everything that is now hidden will be revealed? What will happen with you?

Think about it, Jesus Christ is your judge. How will He judge you? And you know the answer. This is how He does it. He takes all your sins upon Himself, and grants you forgiveness from all, from all [!] your sins.

You are proclaimed to be justified, you are righteous and holy. You are found worthy to enter God's Kingdom. This is how He judges Christians. Do we deserve it? No! Have we done anything to be worthy of it? No! Are we better than others? No!

It is Christ Jesus, our Judge, your Judge, who came and took your sins upon Himself, so that He could say personally to you: "I forgive you all your sins! Come and receive the Kingdom that was prepared for you from before the creation of the world!"

Some may wonder, that in other places Jesus says: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

This is true. When Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, humbled Himself and came into this world as one of us, when He suffered and died, He did all of this, so that He could save us, to save every human being, to save you from the final judgment, and to save you from the eternal condemnation. This was His mission and purpose.

This is why **"whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."**

See, this is how the judgment works. Jesus came to save you, and one thing and one thing only is required from you, to come to the light of Christ, to repent of your evil works, and to receive His forgiveness as the most precious gift. That's it.

How does the judgment happen? When people say 'we don't need this', we want to remain in darkness and we want to continue with our evil works. It is not Jesus who condemns, or judges anyone, it is every person who rejects God's forgiveness themselves. They choose God's judgment by rejecting His forgiveness.

When Jesus returns, He will simply announce the choices we have made today. If you repent of your sins and accept His forgiveness, you are saved and have entered life. If you deny your sins, and thus make God a liar, if you reject His forgiveness, then it is you who have chosen condemnation.

**"Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him."** We need to be reminded about it again and again. Luther put it this way: "I don't know

any other God than this man Jesus Christ.” Of course, this man Jesus is also true God. The point Luther was making was exactly the same that Jesus makes in this words.

You can’t know any other God. There is no other way to know true God except through Jesus. If you want to know what God is like, what His attitude towards you is, look at Jesus. If Him the fullness of God dwells bodily.

What does it mean practically? Come to Jesus and honor Him as God. People often make lame excuses about believing God, or praying God, or trusting God, or being good Christians, or being spiritual, but they don’t want to do anything with this man Jesus. They chose to believe their own imaginary gods.

But this is exactly what Jesus calls – judgment. That people don’t want to come to God Revealed, who comes to us as Jesus, but reject Him and create some other gods according their own ideas. This is what leads to judgement and condemnation.

If you do not honor Jesus, if you do not come where He invites you, if you do not listen to His words, if you do not receive Him in the Holy Sacrament, you do not honor God the Father either, and you have chosen your condemnation. It doesn’t matter how pious and good such people may appear to themselves or to others. All that they do is - remain in darkness, and reject true God.

Because this is so important, to honor the Son, this is why Jesus has made it so clear how to honor Him. To remain in His words, to receive His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, to be a member of His body, the Church, to pray in His name and to love one another and He did.

**“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”** Should we sing, and shout praise as we hear these words?! Yes, we should!

This is your judgment, this is what has happened to you. If you hear Jesus words, you do not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Jesus uses participle when He speaks about hearing.

That is, not those who have simply sometimes heard His words, but these who are hearing, who keep hearing, who keep listening His words, who remain, who dwell in Jesus words, those have passed from death to life.

We need to understand it clearly. Focus your whole attention! If you keep listening to Jesus words, and it means not simply hearing and ignoring, but hearing and obeying, you have already, already [!] passed from death to life.

Understand this, God is God who speaks and does everything by speaking, by means of His words. When you hear His words, this is when He saves you and gives eternal life to you. As you keep listening ... your keep receiving salvation and life.

Listen to the words of Jesus, to the words of the Bible, or you can read them, or study them, and as often as you do it, you receive forgiveness and life. What a wonderful way of receiving our salvation – listening to our Lord and Savior.

Notice also this, Jesus doesn't say that if you will keep obeying me, then at the end, when I judge you, I may give life to you. No, He gives it right now, right now as you listen to Him. That's a miracle and beauty of God's salvation.

He gives it to you right now. It is yours. You may wonder why does our pastor keep repeating that we need to listen to Jesus words. We already have heard them. This is the point – as you listen to Jesus, the Holy Spirit gives salvation to you.

What is the most precious thing we can possible receive? Yes, forgiveness and eternal life. How desperate should we be to hear Jesus speaking, how thirsty and hungry for His words! For thus we receive the greatest gift ever – eternal life.

**“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.**

Now, from these words we can learn about our reality. Jesus speaks about His time and also about our time. He tells us that when the dead hear His voice, they live. Who are these dead? We all are, you are. Before we hear Jesus voice, His words, we are dead in our sins, as the apostle Paul describes it. We are dead and can't do anything to become alive and to be saved. The dead don't do much.

But when you hear the voice of Jesus, when you hear His Gospel, when you learn what He has done and has prepared for you, totally undeservedly, the Holy Spirit makes you alive. The Holy Spirit give life to you – and you are born as a new person, a child of God. This happens because Jesus has life in Himself and He gives it to you as He speaks and as you listen to Him.

This sounds marvelous and incomprehensible. How can we be dead, how can listening to Jesus words can make us alive, how can the Holy Spirit come when we hear Jesus voice... and it is true, these are mysteries of God, but there are much more to come, this is why Jesus continues.

**“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”**

If before He spoke about the Holy Spirit making us alive, when we are dead in our sins, now Jesus speaks about the last day, about the day of final judgment, about the day of ultimate joy for all God's chosen people.

Now we trust and believe to something that is not yet fully revealed. Yes, Jesus showed His disciples what our new resurrected bodies will look like. Yes, He showed the apostle Paul what the paradise is like. Yes, He revealed to the apostle John what the new heavens and the new earth looks like, but all these are just glimpses, given for our encouragement.

Now Jesus speaks about the day when all who have ever lived will hear the commanding and irresistible voice of their Creator and will come back to stand in His presence. Those who have done God's will, who have listened to Jesus words will come to the resurrection of life, and those how have rejected the Son, to the resurrection of judgment.

How sweet are these words! You, who listen to your Lord can long and dream about the day, when all evil and suffering and death will be destroyed and God's chosen people, restored in fullness of their goodness and beauty will stand in God's presence rejoicing together and praising our God of love forever. This will be our ultimate Divine Service, where all the saints and the angels will be together, where we will see our Lord, our Creator, our Saviour face to face.

People can reject Jesus voice today, and this is how they themselves choose condemnation over life. But no one will have an option to resist God's voice when the last day comes. We can't run away from God. We can only run towards Him.

With repentant hearts, admitting our sins, and allowing Him to transfer us from the Kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of His Son by means of forgiveness. Let's do it and let try to bring as many as we can with us. The eternal feast of Jesus Christ is going to be indescribably great and we don't want anyone to miss it.

Amen.