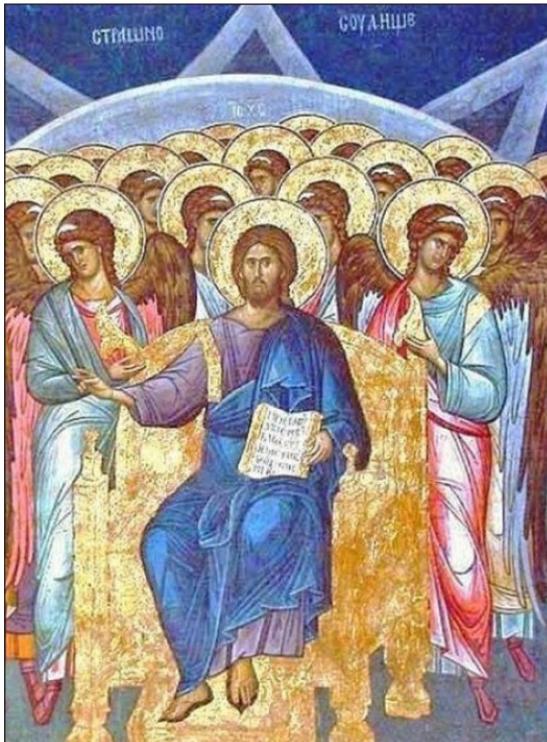


# Meditations

By John Baptist de La Salle

*First Sunday of Advent*

Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC  
Edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, and Francis Huether, FSC





## The Last Judgment

### 1.1 First Point

Speaking of the Last Judgment in today's Gospel, Jesus Christ says that all people will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with great power and majesty.<sup>1</sup> The regal aspect in which Jesus Christ will appear and the great power he will display when he comes to judge the world ought to make us fear his coming. This is what Saint Jerome says, commenting on these words of the Prophet Malachy: Who can think of the day of his coming?<sup>2</sup> If no one dares think of the day of the Last Judgment, because of the majesty and power of him who will be the judge, who will be able to endure the strictness of his judgment? This will be all the more difficult, he adds, because the One who will act as witness will also be the One who will judge; this is what ought to lead us to dread this judgment all the more.

As the same saint says elsewhere, the very severity of the Judge who will render to all of us according to our works<sup>3</sup> will be such that those present will not dare to look him in the face. Then, says Saint Ephrem, there will be a minute and terrible scrutiny of our actions, and even of our thoughts, when each of us appears before this Judge's tribunal. He will make known to the whole world all the thoughts of all, their words and their deeds, all of which were entirely hidden in this life because they were performed in darkness.<sup>4</sup>

So that we, says Saint Augustine, will not endure a terrible and crushing sentence when we appear before the tribunal of this inexorable Judge who will judge us for eternity, let us constantly strive to free ourselves of our defects, for we cannot know either the day or the hour<sup>5</sup> when we will die. Those whose life span is so uncertain must not delay to take the steps needed to insure their salvation.

### *1.2 Second Point*

It is not only the wicked who need to be afraid of the Last Judgment because of the evil life they have led. It will be a harrowing experience for the good as well as the wicked, says Saint Augustine. For, asserts Saint Jerome, there will be few, in fact there will be none, in that general gathering who will not deserve to be reproved with severity and anger by the Judge. This is why, he adds, there is no soul that does not fear God's judgment, for the stars themselves, meaning the saints, will not be pure in his presence.<sup>6</sup> It will be very difficult, this holy doctor continues, to find anyone pure and irreproachable enough to appear before this Judge with assurance and dare to say, who will convict me of sin?<sup>7</sup> Because of this, says Saint Ephrem, all creatures will be penetrated with fear, and all the legions of holy angels will shudder<sup>8</sup> on the great day of the Lord's vengeance.

The main reason why the just themselves will fear while awaiting the Last Judgment is that we will have to give an account not only of the idle words we have spoken,<sup>9</sup> as Jesus Christ says in the Gospel, but even of the good works we have performed, according to what God declares through the Royal Prophet: I will judge justices,<sup>10</sup> meaning all the good that we have accomplished during our life. He will probe it to see if it was truly good and whether anything defective can be found in it. Who of us, then, will not fear God's judgment?

### *1.3 Third Point*

How could we not fear God's judgments, since the greatest saints, despite their eminent holiness, did not fail to dread them? Job, whom God defended against those who reproached him falsely, says to God: I trembled at every action I performed, knowing that you do not pardon the one who sins;<sup>11</sup> and again, What will I do when God will arise to judge me, and when he demands an account of my life, what will I answer him?<sup>12</sup> After relating in considerable detail his manner of living, so upright and so free from sin, he adds that he always dreaded the judgment of God and that this fear had always penetrated him like a heavy burden.<sup>13</sup>

Saint Hilarion, bowed down beneath the weight of years and austerities, was seized with terror at the hour of his death. Saint Jerome, who

had grown grey in solitude and in all sorts of penitential exercises, declares that he had restricted himself in this way and had condemned himself to a sort of prison out of fear of the Last Judgment. He tells us elsewhere that being, as he was, completely filled with sin, he hid himself day and night, fearing that he might hear the words, “Jerome, come forth!” and that he would then be forced to pay the last penny.<sup>14</sup>

Saint Ephrem, who led a solitary life from his childhood and who was so pure, so penitent, and so filled with the Spirit of God, says that his heart trembled and his whole body shook every time he reflected that all our thoughts, words, and actions will be made manifest on Judgment Day. Acknowledging that he was still guilty, he constantly feared to be judged in strict rigor, knowing that he had no excuse for his negligence. If such great saints felt so much fear when considering this terrible day, what feelings of dread ought we not to experience, we who show such little fervor in God’s service and who fulfill our duties so negligently?

## Notes

1. Lk 21:27
2. Mal 3:2
3. Rom 2:6
4. Lk 12:2–3 5. Mt 25:13
6. Jb 15:15
7. Jn 8:46
8. Mk 13:25
9. Mt 12:36
10. Ps 75:3
11. Jb 9:28
12. Jb 31:14
13. Jb 31:23
14. Mt 5:26