HELL IS NOT EMPTY

Bp. Michał Stobnicki

Beloved in Christ the Lord. On this Septuagesima Sunday, 70 days before Easter Sunday, the Lord's Resurrection, we begin the pre-Lenten season. The colour of the liturgical vestments is already violet. The joyful hymn *Gloria* is not sung. The joyful *Alleluia* has fallen silent. Holy Church turns our thoughts toward penance, and so toward something that is extremely unpopular in the modern world, toward penance, which even Catholics would most gladly forget. After all, for several decades they have been hearing again and again that God is merciful, that we will all be in heaven, that God must save every man, that hell is empty, or perhaps that there is no hell at all.

In the year of Our Lord 2018, an Argentine Jesuit, in one of the interviews he gave to his friend, the Italian atheist Eugenio Scalfari, was asked by Scalfari: "His Holiness never spoke about souls who died in sin and go to hell to suffer eternal punishment. He spoke instead about good souls admitted to the contemplation of God. But what about the bad souls? Where are they punished?" And to this Bergoglio replied: "They are not punished. Those who repent receive God's forgiveness. They go among the ranks of the souls who contemplate Him. But those who do not repent and cannot receive forgiveness vanish. Hell does not exist; what exists is the vanishing of sinful souls."

My dear brethren, the foundation of morality is that good is to be rewarded and evil punished. Where there is no punishment for evil, where there is no punishment for sin, there is no morality at all. Hell, my dear ones, is a part of divine justice. If there is a reward for the souls who were faithful to God, then there must also be a punishment for the souls who rejected God, who trampled on the will of God. And that is, after all, the teaching of the Catholic Church. Recall, for example, the constitution *Benedictus Deus* of 1336, in which Pope Benedict XII, in accord with the centuries-old teaching of the holy Church, declared: "Moreover we define that, according to the general disposition of God, the souls of those who die in actual mortal sin go down into hell immediately after their death, where they suffer the torments of hell."

My dear ones, a great son of the Franciscan order, Saint Bonaventure, used to say that even if God revealed to him that only one single soul in the whole world would be damned, he would not give up any of the penitential practices he had performed in his life, because he could never be sure that this one single damned soul would not be himself. So said the great saint. Our Blessed Mother, Our Lord Jesus, the saints have pointed out again and again and warned that hell exists and is not empty. There is no vanishing of souls. There is a place where there will be, as Our Lord says, weeping and gnashing of teeth. A place of eternal misery, a place of eternal punishment. Saint Peter the Apostle, in his letter, asked with pastoral concern: "If the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

SPIRITUAL LAZINESS

Dear faithful, as we begin this pre-Lenten season, we must realise that if we want to save our souls, we must cooperate with God's grace. We must profess the Catholic faith and live in the state of sanctifying grace. The Saviour warns us in the Gospel: "Many are called, but few are chosen." And it is not as it seems to modern man, to the modern Catholic, that we can idle away our whole life, that somehow it will turn out all right. It is not so, my dear ones, that God must save us. It is not so that our future does not depend on how we live here and now.

And look, often when we observe other people, the colleagues we come into contact with at work, we get annoyed seeing how sloppily they work. We think to ourselves: after all, we would do it much better, much faster. But look, in the spiritual life, are we not similar to such sloppy people? Is it not the case that we supposedly want to improve, but not today, maybe tomorrow? We supposedly want to change, but not too much, so that it does not require too great an effort, so that it does not hurt us too much. And such spiritual laziness has proved, my dear ones, a deadly trap for millions of souls. Spiritual laziness has led

millions of souls straight into the fire of hell. Putting off penance until later, postponing work on oneself, disregarding God's inspirations.

Dear faithful, God loves every man and grieves when He sees souls falling into the fire of hell. But hell is man's choice. The choice of a man who turns his back on God, who despises His will, despises His law and prefers to live in his own way. Our Lord Jesus did everything He could for our salvation. He became man, took on human nature, offered Himself on the wood of the Cross in a propitiatory sacrifice. He remained present with us in the Most Blessed Sacrament. He gives us His grace through the seven sacraments. And all the time we, we Catholics, walk past the Saviour indifferently and say to Him: "Not now, maybe tomorrow, maybe next year, maybe someday I will take You seriously. Today I have more important things on my mind."

Dear faithful, when you want to buy a new car, you can save for months and years. A woman who wants to achieve her dream figure can eat almost nothing for months. An athlete, for a moment of fame, for a plastic medal or cup, can train day after day for long years, because we know perfectly well that if we want to reach some goal, we must sacrifice something. We must commit ourselves. And what about our soul? Our Catholic souls lie fallow like a field without a farmer. And yet Saint Paul the Apostle admonishes us: "Everyone that striveth for the mastery refraineth himself from all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one."

On Septuagesima Sunday in the year of Our Lord 2026, there rings, perhaps for the last time, the alarm clock that is meant to tear us out of spiritual sleep, out of spiritual stagnation, out of spiritual laziness, and carry us off into a spiritual marathon in which we should run so as to earn the imperishable crown, the eternal crown, the reward of eternal life. And perhaps this is your last chance to attend to the weed-overgrown field of your soul. And it does not matter whether you are young or old, poor or rich, it does not matter what you do in life, it does not matter what your life has looked like up to now. Today the divine Saviour calls every man into His service. Today the divine Householder wishes to agree with us on the denarius of eternal life.

And it is important that in the Lord's vineyard we work through the time that still remains to us here as solidly and as zealously as possible, that we answer seriously, with all our strength, this call from the lips of the divine Householder, who knows perfectly well our weakness, our frailty, our sins, our past, but who, after all, does not cease to call frail man into His service. And may none of us have to be ashamed of his laziness at the final judgement. May none of us, my dear ones, have to be ashamed that he sat idle when Our Lord Jesus cried out, called to work in His vineyard. May none of us have to be ashamed of his indifference toward the salvation of his own soul. *Tempus fugit*, *aeternitas manet*. Time flies, eternity waits.

Amen. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.