

Homily based on the readings from July 30, 2026 (Jeremiah 18.1-6;
Matthew 13.47-53)

Thus it will be at the end of the age.

*The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous
and throw them into the fiery furnace,
where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.*

This passage reiterates a fact that most of us instinctively know to be true, but which we are often afraid to discuss: hell is real and a large number of people – including many we know personally – will wind up spending eternity there. In other words, hell is not just an empty threat or a hypothetical possibility, but a concrete and definite *reality*.

One of the most misguided trends within the Church over the past several decades is our reluctance to speak directly about hell. As a Christian community, we rarely mention hell at all and, if we do, we tend to portray it as an exceptionally rare outcome – something that only

happens to people like Judas or Hitler or Stalin. While there may be a *few* people who deliberately misrepresent the Church's teachings, this shift is mainly the result of well-intentioned individuals – particularly members of the clergy – not wanting to be perceived as harsh or confrontational. It is certainly true that hell is not a pleasant topic, and we need to be careful not to dwell on it excessively. Nevertheless, as Christians, we all have an indispensable obligation to speak the truth – regardless of whether it is popular or polite. People's eternal souls are at stake. The *least* we can do is suffer through a few uncomfortable conversations.

There are at least two reasons that it is essential for Christians to speak more candidly about hell. The first is to provide a warning – to remind people that our actions have consequences, which can very easily lead to eternal damnation. In doing so, we must be exceptionally careful *not* to frame the discussion as the *virtuous* chastising the *sinful*, but as weak and weary pilgrims offering each other assistance. As we all know, there is no place in God's kingdom for *self*-righteousness.

Another reason to be more forthright about *hell* is to help people understand the true nature of *heaven*. Heaven is not just a location, but a state of everlasting and undying *love* – as the Catechism describes it, a “communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels, and all the blessed.” Love, by its very nature, can never be compelled. The reason hell exists is because God cannot *force* anyone to love him. If – in the final analysis – we choose to separate ourselves from his love, then *we* will have to endure the consequences of that decision. The true horror of hell is not flames or pitchforks, but the willful and irrevocable rejection of God’s love.

As in all things, we must focus – first and foremost – on the joys of our Christian faith. Nevertheless, just as experiencing the dark can sometimes help us to appreciate the light, the reality of hell accentuates the unending bliss of heaven. While God will never give up on any of his beloved children, in the end the choice between heaven and hell belongs to each of us. Pray that we may all possess the courage, the wisdom, and the grace to enter through the narrow gate.