

Homily based on the readings from March 18, 2026 (Isaiah 49.8-15;  
John 5.17-30)

In this day and age – when Catholics are worried about appearing overly harsh or judgmental – there is an acute temptation to downplay the Church’s understanding of *Hell*. All human beings – even ardent atheists – tend to admire the idea of Heaven, even if they do not actually *believe* in it. Hell, on the other hand, is a *much* less appealing proposition – as well it *should* be. Nevertheless, Hell is not a concept that was invented by the Church to frighten children or reprimand sinners. It is an eternal reality – one that is woven into the very *fabric* of Creation.

Even though it is natural to focus on the more *positive* aspects of our faith, we need to be careful *never* to disregard the teachings we find uncomfortable. As we all know, death is an *inevitability* for every one of us – and there are only *two* possibilities for the final outcome. We must never lose sight that the choices we make in *this* life have a *direct*

impact on our status in the next. Although we should avoid any sort of morbid obsession, most of us would do well to spend a bit more time meditating on the nature of Hell. In the words of Saint Philip Neri: “He who does not go down into Hell while he is *alive* runs a great risk of going there after he is *dead*.”

Part of the problem, I think, is that our society *viciously* caricatures any concepts that contradict its chosen narrative. For the past sixty years, at *least*, the forces of secularism have sought to *deny* the consequences of our personal misdeeds – pretending that there are no objective standards of right and wrong, that *we* are the sole arbiters of our own actions. To maintain this fallacy, Hell must be represented as an outdated superstition – a cynical tool for enforcing an obsolete moral code. As Christians, however, it is our *unwavering* duty to remind people of the *truth*.

The *truth*, of course, is that Hell is real and that many of us are in serious danger of going there. That is basically the theme of today’s Gospel:

[T]he hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs  
will hear his voice and will come out,  
those who have done good deeds  
to the resurrection of life,  
but those who have done wicked deeds  
to the resurrection of condemnation.

The point we need to emphasize – both to ourselves and to others – is that while Christ is the one who pronounces the final judgment, the *decision* as to where we spend eternity is ours, and ours alone. In fact, Jesus makes this point explicitly: “I judge as I hear, and my judgment is just.” As the Catechism elaborates:

To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever *by our own free choice*. This state of definitive *self-exclusion* from communion with God and the blessed is called “hell.” (1033)

In other words, God does not send anyone to Hell. We do that completely on our own.

The good news here, of course, is the *Good News* – namely, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God *desperately* longs for the salvation of all of his beloved children, and rejoices *infinitely* at the return of even a single wayward son or daughter. God will never give up on *any* of us, as long as we do not give up on him. For our part, we must never forget the *reality* of the decision we have to make – and the *consequences* if we choose badly.