

Homily based on the readings from June 23, 2026 (2 Kings 19.9b-11, 14-21, 31-35a, 36; Matthew 7.6, 12-14)

As you may recall, yesterday's Gospel directed us never to make pronouncements about whether another person is going to heaven or to hell: "[s]top judging, that you may not be judged." Today's Gospel can be viewed as the *opposite* side of the *same* coin – as a reminder that hell is not just a hypothetical possibility, but a concrete and undeniable reality: "for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many." In other words, although we never know specifically *who* is bound for hell, it is *indisputable* that a substantial number of human beings will eventually wind up there.

One of the most misguided theological trends of the past several decades has been the minimization of hell. As a Christian community, we tend to speak much less about hell today than we did in previous generations. Moreover, if we mention hell at all, we often dismiss it as an atypical or uncommon outcome. Neither of these developments is positive. While

*some* people may be maliciously misrepresenting Christian teaching, for the most part this shift is 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 have mentioned previously, 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 must endure the consequences of that decision. This willful and irrevocable rejection of divine love is precisely what we have come to know as *hell*.

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 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 follow the right path.