



# Sermon

## 'The Victory of God'

Year B 2018, Easter Day



‘Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us.  
So let us celebrate the feast.’

Today we celebrate the victory of God. The victory of God over the power of sin. The victory of God over the the power of death that is the consequence of sin. The power of sin and death that in this world crucified the Son of God. The power of sin and death in this world, that today is conquered, revealed, and overcome, by the power of God himself. Today, the emperor of this world has no clothes. Today, the Kingdom of God, has come. Today, the kingdom of the world, has become the kingdom of God and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.

In September last year, I had the enormous privilege, of travelling to Rome, and visiting the Sistine Chapel, with my family. Standing there, before Michelangelo’s painting of the resurrected Christ, we were both deeply moved by our experience.

The Last Judgment is a fresco by the Italian Renaissance painter Michelangelo. Covering the whole altar wall of the Sistine Chapel, it is copied on the front cover of your order of service this morning. Beyond being simply an artist, Michelangelo was a theologian. A theologian who understood the power of art, to communicate profound meaning.

The meaning of the painting<sup>1</sup>, the Last Judgment, is meaning that is given to it, by the fresco painting of Michelangelo on the ceiling. God's creation of Adam, is followed by Adam and Eve's fall from God. The fall that mortifies the human body, making it a slave, to death itself. 'The last judgment' is a powerful warning against the vanity of the world. And of the inevitability of future judgment. When Jesus Christ returns, as the future judge of the world. To whom 'All authority in heaven and on earth has [now] been given'.

The resurrection of Jesus is the arrival into this world of sin, of a new humanity. The resurrection of Jesus, the beginning of a new human race. A new humanity, a new human race, in eternal fellowship with God, and, on this basis, with one another. A new humanity, in the kingdom of God himself. With the resurrection of Jesus, and his exaltation into heaven to reign at the right hand of God the Father, there has come into the world, a new kingdom. A kingdom unlike any other. The kingdom of God himself.

A humanity, and a kingdom, that is now the one sure hope of the world. The one sure ground of the human race. In its longing for a human destiny, beyond the merely human kingdoms of this world. Beyond a world of disappointment, in the ongoing merely human political order of this world. A future destiny, a sure hope, set out in Revelation,

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<sup>1</sup> With credit to the Vatican museum in its description of the painting.

‘Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, come down out of heaven from God. And I heard a loud voice from the throne of heaven say, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more. For the first things have passed away.’

Taken as a whole, Michelangelo’s fresco gives the impression of a huge empty space. A mysterious whirlwind gives movement to the whole. The powerful figure in the center is Christ himself. He has wounds in his hands and his side. His body bears the signs of his passion. But it has not been weakened by death. It shows the full strength and power of the resurrection.

With his right hand raised, and his body turned to the left, he is rejecting those who, in this life, rejected him. His other hand is stretched out in a gesture of welcome, for those who in this life, accepted him. As all of the just are drawn upwards, in a spiral, towards him, their Lord, and their God.

It is the moment of truth. The world will now be seen in its proper light. As it truly is. With his painting, Michelangelo openly and powerfully affirms, the future recreation of history, the future destiny of the human race, in the eternal kingdom of God.

The focal point of this great circular movement, is Christ himself. The Son of Man, arriving on the clouds of heaven, he distils the essence of the history of the world. He reveals the final truth, of the human race. The veil of appearance is now being lifted. By the perfect objectivity, of Christ, who is the judge.

Today is Easter, The Feast of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In his resurrection, is the future resurrection of the human race. In his risen life, the future destiny, of the human race. Easter joy is the hope of the world. It transforms doubt, into hope. Despair, into joy. The subtle thread of Michelangelo's painting, the symbol that is able to resolve human misery, and set it within a positive framework of future hope, is the body. The resurrection body of Jesus, the Son of God.