

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

The Great Divorce **All Saints** Thursday, November 1, 2018 Rev 7:2-4, 9-14; 1 Jn 3:1-3; Mt 5:1-12a (People's choices are honored and yet their freedom to change is also there, but they don't want to change.)

I can hardly ever come to the feast of All Saints and All Souls tomorrow without thinking of the **wonderful novel by C. S. Lewis called *The Great Divorce***. Lewis wrote this book because of a great theological problem that many, many theologians and thinkers have had in the history of our Church. It has to do with this: **if God's love is infinite and his goodness is infinite, which we believe and we proclaim, then how could he ever abandon anyone eternally in some sort of eternal perdition?** That is the question. On the other hand, **if you say that God eventually saves everyone**, which some people do believe: St. Gregory of Nysa, St. John Paul II implied it, at least it was very possible, as well as sister Faustina in promoting the *Divine Mercy* prayer, **you could become complacent and really do yourself great damage, which is one reason the Church does not proclaim it, per se.**

So C. S. Lewis took up the challenge of explaining how we could have a hell and yet it would not in any way diminish the goodness or love of God, and so he wrote this story. The nature of hell, according to C. S. Lewis, is a place where people live who have rejected God. Now there is a bus, he says, **every day there is a bus that goes up to heaven, and anyone who wants to get on that bus may do so.** And they do because they are very bored in hell. Hell is very boring, so they get on the bus, they go to heaven, **but they don't ever stay there.** Why? They don't like it. Why don't they like it? Because in heaven people are poor in spirit, and they are not. In heaven people are meek, and they are not. In heaven people hunger and thirst for righteousness, and they don't. In heaven people are merciful, and they aren't. In heaven people are peacemakers, and they are not. That's the idea that he came up with. So we see that in this way **people's choices are honored and yet their freedom to change is also there, but they don't want to change.** That is where hell

begins. Whether indeed anyone ever ends up there, Pope St. John Paul said, we don't know. We don't have any revelation that one soul has ever been lost in hell, but it's possible. But if it's possible, it begins with not wanting to change, **not wanting to be blessed, not wanting to take on the qualities of God.**

Now when we celebrate **All Saints**, we are celebrating the fact that many, many have taken on the qualities of God. They are generous. They are merciful. They are loving. They are stouthearted. **In every way they are living out the humanity that Jesus himself perfected in his incarnation.** So it's something to celebrate that at least some have decided to do this. And we have to recognize that **if we want to be saved, if we want to live in eternal life, we have to begin now by being what God wants us to be.**