

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 07-31-2022

“Brothers and sisters: if you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.”

There's was a man named Joseph who was lying on his deathbed. As Joseph was laying there our Lord appeared to him and asked him, “Joseph, do you love me?” And Joseph shook his fist violently toward heaven. Then our Lord appeared a second time and asked him, “Joseph, did you ever love me?” And again Joseph shook his fist violently toward heaven. Finally, our Lord appeared a third time to him and asked him, “Joseph, will you love me?” Unfortunately, for Joseph again he shook his fist violently toward heaven and died.

This is the terrible story about the death of none other than Joseph Stalin, the first communist leader of Soviet Russia and one of the most murderous men in human history.

One might be tempted to question the accuracy of the story, but I understand it was told by his own daughter, Svetlana.

Personally, I'd prefer that it not be true because I figure if there is one person in hell then that means there will probably be more, and I don't want to be among them. But Scripture doesn't take into consideration my preferences.

Anyway, whether the story is true or not doesn't really matter because the point it makes is a very serious one.

Joseph Stalin was born on December 18, 1878 and baptized an Orthodox Christian on December 29 of the same year. Several years later in August 1894 he entered the Orthodox Tiflis Spiritual Seminary and began studies for the Orthodox priesthood.

However, as he grew older he lost interest in his priestly studies and he was repeatedly confined to his cell for bad behavior. The seminary's journal noted that he declared himself an atheist and refused any respect toward the monks in the community.

Around that time he began reading secular books which led him to Das Kapital by Karl Marx. It was then that he became a devoted Marxist Communist.

In baptism Joseph Stalin was raised with Christ, to seek what was above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. However, he turned all his thoughts away from what is above, to what is on earth, which is the very nature of Communism.

Stalin is an extreme example of what can happen when one turns completely away from Christ, but it should serve as a warning to everyone.

Communism stands in complete opposition to religion of any kind and Stalin took this enmity to its fiercest end – it's estimated that he was responsible for the deaths of more than 60 million men, women and children.

At the end of Stalin's life, he had amassed much wealth and power but "God said to him, 'You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?' Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God."

Stalin came to a rather premature end to his life at the height of wealth and power at the age of only 61 years old in the midst of an impoverished and fearful nation of his own making.

And as we heard he may very well have even lost his even his soul at the end of his life as well.

Turning away from Christ is always evil. It may not lead everyone to the atrocities of a man like Stalin, but it can still lead to hell.

So let's never forget that we too were raised with Christ in baptism so we must seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God and think of what is above, not of what is on earth because everyone was made for heaven not hell.