

Ordinary Time 33C 2016

God's Judgment

In Montville, where my brother lives, there is a sign in front of a church: “Prepare to meet your Maker!” Every time I see it, I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, I find it threatening and unwelcoming. It’s not the message I want to hear. On the other, I know this message should not be taken lightly since it comes from the Book of the Prophet Malachi, the same prophet we heard in today’s first reading: “Lo, the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble.”

Jesus proclaims a similar message in the gospel. He warns us that the time of God’s judgment is approaching. But before that day arrives, he says, there will be a period of suffering and persecution, and only those who persevere will be saved.

To tell the truth, I am not sure how to react to these texts of judgment. They speak about something that seems so distant in the future that it doesn’t affect me. But I know that these texts that make me so uncomfortable are saying something I dare not overlook. For example, in the Creed, we say: “He will come again to judge the living and the dead.” We profess there will be a moment, at the end of the ages, when God will have the last word, a word of justice and judgment, a word that will reveal all that is good and all that is evil, a word in which we will be revealed to ourselves, to others, and to God.

That judgment is both frightening and comforting. On the one hand it is terrifying to know there will be a moment when everything we have done will be revealed in a way that will surprise even us. On the other, it is comforting to know that the One who reveals and judges us will be Christ, the one who will set everything aright.

But the judgment of God is not reserved for the future alone. God's judgment is happening today, right now. Every time we speak a word of anger, *we are condemning ourselves*. Every time, we speak a word of love, *we are embracing God's salvation*. Every time we cloth ourselves with resentment, *we are judging ourselves*. Every time we extend mercy and forgiveness to others, *we are forgiven*.

That sign in Montville reminds me that we are preparing to meet our Maker by what we do and fail to do every day. We are rushing to judgement or to salvation every day by what we say and do. The judgment of God is not far in the future; it is near and close at hand. It is today. Today is a day of salvation, if we live in and with Christ. Today is a day of fearsome condemnation, if we close in on ourselves and live selfishly.

I still feel uncomfortable when I see that sign: "Prepare to meet your Maker." But I know it says something important that I dare not overlook: that we are always living under God's judgment.