

# Judgement

*Readings: Romans chapter 1, verses 1-25; John chapter 3, verses 16-21*

Judgement is one of the themes which the Church focuses on during Advent. The Old Testament is full of **Judgement** stories and most of them are pretty scary. Plenty of hellfire and brimstone stuff. Its not surprising that a lot of it is carried over into the New Testament. In all these Judgement stories, God is the Judge and on Judgement Day God sorts out the sheep and the goats, consigning one lot to Heaven and the other lot to Hell. Its not surprising that Christian preachers have seized on this idea and used it as a carrot/stick in fiery sermons. Repent now — or else face an eternity of torment in Hell.

But in John's gospel and some of Paul's letters we get a very different picture. And the words of Jesus in John's gospel revolutionise our idea of Judgement. "This the judgement: that light has come into the world and men preferred darkness rather than light." The implications of that change our whole way of thinking.

It means that, far from God judging us, we judge ourselves. We are judged by our response to Christ who is the Light of the World. It is our response to Christ which judges us. There is a story about a man who visited an art gallery where paintings by acknowledged Masters were displayed. He stood in front of one and commented; "I don't think much of this one". And the curator of the gallery who was standing beside him said; "Sir, the paintings are not on trial". The man had condemned himself out of his own mouth. He had judged himself. So it is with us. Confronted with Jesus we see in Him all that we are meant to be and all that we can be. And by our response to Him we are judged. It is a judgement that we pass upon ourselves.

The corollary of that is that, at the Final Judgement, God will simply ratify the judgement we have already passed upon ourselves. All too often we picture the Final Judgement in Bookkeeping terms. We stand before God and He adds up the good we have done; the bad we have done and if we have a credit balance we are in. If we have a debit balance there is hell to pay. Nothing could be further from the truth. For the fact is that if God judged us on our accumulated balance then Heaven would be empty and Hell would be over-populated. We are judged on the basis of our response to Christ and, on that basis, we judge ourselves.

This ties in perfectly with what Paul said to the Romans. He spoke about the judgement of God and said that God handed them over to the consequences of their own wrong-doing. Its not that God inflicts a punishment upon us. We are not punished **FOR** our sins but **BY** our sins. Built into the very fabric of our life are laws both natural and spiritual. If we choose to defy them and break them then certain consequences follow and these represent a judgement. So, for instance, if we think to defy the law of gravity and jump from the top floor of a 10 storey building the consequence is that we will die. And that is a judgement. The same applies to the moral laws which govern our universe. Defy them; break them and there inevitable consequences. They constitute a judgement but its one which we pass upon ourselves; invoked by the decisions we make.

The other point to be made is that judgement is an on-going activity. Traditionally we have thought of Judgement Day as located in the future (whether at the moment of death or when Christ comes again). This can result in a dangerous complacency and the words of Jesus nail that idea. We are judged by our response to His coming and the fact is that Christ comes in the here and now - not just at some future date, If there is a future judgement it will be a Final Judgement and it will be a matter of God endorsing and rubber-stamping those decisions we make now.

Christ comes to us today and every day. He comes in our worship and challenges through His word. He comes in the sacrament and the Bread and Wine are the body of Christ broken for us. He comes in every moral choice we have to make and He is present as we respond to the needs of people. "Insofar as you fed the hungry and clothed the naked and gave water to the thirsty **you did it to me.**" (Matthew 25).

All of which is a huge challenge to us. We are forging our eternal destiny by the choices we make in the here and now. Judgement is built into those choices and when the Day of Reckoning finally comes it will be a matter of God rubber-stamping those decisions and actions. That's judgement!

I end with part of a poem by Studdert Kennedy which says it all. He begins by outlining the traditional expectation of Judgement Day.

*Our Padre were a solemn bloke,  
We called him dismal Jim.  
It fairly gave the ' blooming creeps  
To sit and hark at him,*

*When he were on with Judgment Day,  
About that great white Throne,  
And 'how each chap would have to stand,  
And answer on his own.*

*And if he tried to chance his arm,  
And hide a single sin,  
There'd be the angel Gabriel,  
With books to do him in.*

The poem ends with a different picture;

*There ain't no throne, and there ain't no books,  
It's Him you've got to see,  
It's Him, just Him, that is the Judge  
Of blokes like you and me.*

*And boys I'd sooner frizzle up,  
In the flames of a burning Hell,  
Than stand and look into His face,  
And hear His voice say – 'Well?'*