

The Day of the Lord

I have a vivid recollection of air raid drills during the World War II. I couldn't have been more than four or five years old. We had to turn out the lights throughout the house and pull down all the shades. It was a scary time, especially since what we were hiding from were the bad guys my three older brothers were fighting across the ocean. Curious to a fault, I had to know what was going on outside. So I lifted the edge of the shade to peer out into the dark night, even though we were told that if we did, we would see the devil. There was no devil. But there was certainly a palpable fear of the very thought of the presence of evil.

My memories are also of the efforts individual citizens took in the "war effort." War ration books and tokens were issued to each American family, dictating how much gasoline, tires, sugar, meat, silk, shoes, nylons and other items any one person could buy. Even chicken-wire fencing was rationed. Food substitutions became evident with real butter being replaced with "oleo margarine," which had to be prepared

in the home with a coloring agent. We didn't simply cower in the face of evil; we took action!

As we approach the end of the church year next week, we seize the opportunity to reflect on the power of evil to challenge the Reign of God. Though our faith declares that Christ will triumph over sin and death—and we'll celebrate that next weekend with the feast of Christ the King—today we reflect on the power of evil in the world and the challenge it presents to us here and now.

The images that the Scripture writers use have the potential for the same terrifying impact that air raid sirens, darkened houses, and abandoned streets did in the early 1940's. The intended use of Luke's images is not so much to frighten as it is to alert us. We are being called to be attentive and ready to advance the Reign of God by taking action to confront what threatens it. Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians was prompted by their inactivity in awaiting the coming of the Lord. Psalm 98, sung as a response to Malachi's chilling challenge, offers a cosmic dimension to the coming of the "Day of the Lord."

*God will rule the world with justice
and the peoples with equity.*

The promise of a world where justice reigns is a consistent and compelling vision throughout the Hebrew Testament as well as the Christian Scriptures. The foundation of justice is equity, a sense of fairness among people. Justice is rooted in the acceptance of all people as equal in the eyes of God.

As those who believe in the Son of God, we see with the eyes of Jesus, the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to seek the lost or forsaken without judgment, and only with compassion. It is only with the eyes of compassion that we can see the inequities in our world that threaten the Reign of God, the dawning of a New Creation. The eyes of compassion enable us to see the evil in our midst: in the legitimacy of violence, in the oppression of the poor, in the abuse of immigrants, in the demonization of opponents, in the denial of basic human rights to anyone who is different. What God intends for us is clear in Jesus' prayer:

*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
On earth, as it is in heaven.*

We look at the critical issues facing the world today and we are legitimately in fear of our future. But would it be safe to say that those issues are the specter of a world vision blinded to the commonality of all people? In the darkened streets of Cleveland decades ago, I feared an evil I could not see. But I learned as a child that evil would not win because everyone was of the same mind and willing to make the same sacrifices necessary to do what needed to be done. If we would only see with the eyes of compassion, we would know where evil threatens a truly just and equitable society here on earth and do what needs to be done to bring about the promise of the Reign of God.