

17th Sun A, '14

Introduction

What is the Gospel all about?

What is is 'God's Kingdom' or 'God's Reign' referred to in the Gospel?

I God's Kingdom

The Gospel obviously describes 'God's Kingdom' or 'God's Reign' as something very desirable,

something for which we would "sell all that we have."

I guess that means our TV sets, our entertainment centers, our ipads and ipods.

Our new Car? Woa! Wait a minute. Let's not get carried away.

Ok. Let's spell this out a bit.

Let me give an example...

I have a retired friend who now lives in the Charlotte, S.C.

Recently we were together and he was describing some volunteer work he has gotten involved with.

For some people you are born, you work, you retire and you play golf... Not my friend.

Although he plays some golf and enjoys his retirement and not having the responsibilities of working, he volunteers time each week at a local soup kitchen that feeds a lot of the homeless in the city.

He told me the following story...

He got to know some of the homeless.

One day while walking through a park near the soup kitchen he spotted Gary.

Gary was a meth addict and he was high on meth.

He was sitting on a park bench holding his hand and talking to himself.

He didn't look good – few meth addicts *look* good.

As a matter of fact he looked terrible...

shabby clothes, hair disheveled, teeth missing, skin and bones. You get the picture.

My friend walked over to him and Gary – that was his name – imagine that – my friend know his name –

Gary held out his hand and mumbled that he had been bitten by a squirrel.

My friend called 911.

When the ambulance came the EMS folks took one look at Gary and talked about just walking away from this mess.

My friend insisted that they take Gary to the ER – after all, Gary was a person, even if messed up. My friend also asked that they tell the doctors that Gary had been bitten by a squirrel. The EMS people loaded Gary into the ambulance and headed toward the hospital.

Two days later my friend was helping at the soup kitchen when he saw Gary walking down the sidewalk toward the soup kitchen. He looked a bit better. He had washed up a bit, his hair was combed, and he didn't have that wild look about him.

My friend asked him how he was feeling, and he said, "Better than two days ago." Then he showed my friend his bandaged hand and said that he had received rabies shots and he was going to be ok. They headed into the kitchen for breakfast together. What do you make of that story? Was the meth problem solved? Would Gary be ok in the future? Or was this just fighting an unwinnable war?

When I look at it I see the "Kingdom of God" or the "Reign of God," present in that moment, in that human encounter.

Did Mother Theresa of Calcutta solve the world problems of poverty and homelessness?

If not, why was she so revered by so many in the world?

I believe that she reminds us that deep down we are all children of God, wounded or messed up as some people sometimes get.

This reminds me of another story...

Ben was walking on the ocean shore down at Atlantic City.

As he strolled along he noticed a man further ahead of him bending over once in a while and throwing a star fish back into the ocean...

the beach at low tide was covered with star fish

which had been washed ashore during high tide.

Ben walked up to the man throwing a few of the star fish back into the ocean and said to him,

"Excuse me, but why throw that star fish you're holding back into the ocean? There are so many of them you can't save them all."

The man looked at Ben and said,

"I know what I do doesn't make much of a difference to so many other star fish,

but it makes a big difference to this one I'm about to throw back into the ocean"

My friend helping the meth addict told me that he knew his actions didn't solve the meth problem and didn't help other addicts... but it certainly made a difference to Gary. Gary would probably have wandered off back into the park and died. My friend said that he looked at Gary not just as a meth addict, but as a child of God whom he could help a bit on this day.

To my understanding, that is the Kingdom of God... that is where God was present in a beautiful way on that day.

Jesus didn't heal everyone... but for those he did heal it made a big difference...

Wherever you see people caring for other people, wherever you see kindness and compassion, wherever you see forgiveness – that is where God's Reign is taking place.

Just watch what Jesus does and you will see God's Kingdom... not brought to fulfillment – that will only be at the end of time... but 'God's Kingdom', 'God's Reign' begun now. Isn't that what Jesus announced?

I see the Kingdom of God in a husband's care for his ailing wife in the hospital,
I see God's Reign in my niece's being by her mother's side in a Hospice residence,
I see God's Kingdom when a parent tries to deal with an addicted daughter,
I see God's Reign in AA and in Alinon groups...
not that these people are perfect,
but they are trying to bring God's help and compassion and encouragement into our world in the midst of suffering and pain.

I pray, O God, give me an understanding heart that I might see your Kingdom in my world,
so burdened by Bad News and darkness and evil.

II The Pearl

Let's get back to the Gospel.

Jesus says that God's Kingdom is like an exquisite pearl which a person finds, then goes off and sells all has and buys it.

What is that all about?

Notice that the "exquisite pearl" is not the Kingdom, but the whole process – the finding, the selling, and acquiring – that is the Kingdom.

Let's go back to my friend down south.

He was obviously touched by the soup kitchen and the work they did... the service they gave.

He admired their work.

He became devoted to the work they did.

He began to help.

He began to follow their example,

and he even got to know some of the homeless they served.

He got to know the meth addict Gary.

He had to sell – to get rid of - his dislike and bias toward the homeless.

He had to get rid of his fear of the homeless and of street people. He didn't get rid of his common sense, but of his bias.

He had to get rid of his self-centered concern just for himself.

He had to get rid of letting his worries about his own health keep his vision stuck on himself.

The Question we seldom ask ourselves... What is God calling me to do?

My friend is a man of prayer who loves God and therefore prays not just for himself and his loved ones,

but also prays that "God's Kingdom come, God's will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

My friend realizes that he can be a part of God's will being done here and now...

God's Kingdom come here and now...

as is the man taking care of his bed ridden wife,

the parents dealing with addiction,

folks in AA and Alinon and NA.

Conclusion

My friends, as we continue with this Mass, let us ask that God's will be done and God's Kingdom come among us this day.

From the Desk of Donald Ware, C.P.

We remember God's love for us as Jesus pours out his blood on the Cross to deliver us from darkness, from evil and from sinfulness and self-centeredness and selfishness.

We offer ourselves together with Jesus whom we admire and love to our Father.

And we ask that we God help us to bring God's Kingdom into our world, our family, our neighborhood, our work and our school – one person at a time, one day at a time.

Remember the Prayer of St. Francis...

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...

Where there is hatred let me bring ...?

Where there is doubt let me bring ...?

Where there is despair let me bring ...?

Where there is darkness let me bring ...?

Amen.