

Along the track

The Kingdom of God is Within You

(Luke 17: 21)

(Third of four meditations on the Kingdom)

The Kingdom is not something to come, something about structures or rules or regulations or systems of belief. It begins, like the tiny mustard seed, in the heart of every person. That was an important part of Jesus' message.

'Your faith has saved you', Jesus said on more than one occasion to those who came to him for help, those who were open to healing of mind and heart as well as of suffering and illness, those who came seeking healing for the demons within. Jesus could sense the action of God in them, in those who were open to God in the joys and sadnesses of life, the good times and the bad. Jesus could sense the action of God in the rich young man who came asking what more he could do, in those who came seeking healing, in those who came to listen to him, those who opted to follow him. He could sense the action of God in the Centurion who came seeking healing for his servant, in the Syrophenician woman at the well, in Nicodemus, in the woman who touched his garment, in Mary Magdalene.

Jesus' message was clear – God is already here, urging a more fulfilled life for everyone. Jesus' stories of the Kingdom, about the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price which the merchant sells all to possess are really all about us – the treasure is hidden within us, the pearl is God's presence within. Our real treasure lies within, the gift of this inner life. The role of religion is to bring us closer to God, to make us more aware of God's presence, to God's call in life to life.

Are we open to life, to its opportunities for endless development, not closing ourselves off but rather choosing to be more than we thought we could be... rather than choosing to be less than what we ought to be? Sometimes we call the latter 'sin'! That's why we seek forgiveness 'for what we have done and what we have failed to do'. Life's many challenges offer us the opportunity to choose life, as it were, the chance to be everything we are meant to be. That takes courage and a faith that deepens our awareness of God's love, a faith that urges us to find that love in all the joys, failures, misunderstandings and questions we encounter, a faith that seeks to find God's presence in others. The Kingdom of God renews and transforms and recreates those touched by it. But to see it, to experience it, to live by its vision we must change our way of thinking. And acting. We begin by connecting with the treasure within, the Kingdom within.

Jesus offered an insight into what lives ought to be. How happy are those who know they have great spiritual needs, who recognise their need for God and are open to God's ways. How happy are those who are desperately sorry for the suffering and the sorrow of this world. The joy God will give them can never be taken away. Blessed is the person who has the humility to know their own limitations, their own weaknesses and needs and who have put their whole trust in God. They will be able to see

God. Blessed are those who want to do right more than anything else, they will find complete fulfillment. Blessed is the person who tries to understand the other's mind and heart, to walk in their shoes and is ready to forgive. They will also receive forgiveness.

Blessed is the person whose motives are always honest and straightforward, for that person shall be able to see God. Blessed are those who have a passion for justice and who work to bring peace and reconciliation among people, for they are doing the work of God.

Blessed are those who are treated badly for doing good, for doing the right thing. God will remain always close to them. (Mt 5: 3-6)

God's saving presence is at work in them now, not just as a reward in the time to come. He offered salvation to those who visited the lonely and those in prison, those who clothed those without possessions, those who cared for the sick, those who worked for justice. That's what the kingdom of God is like!

Jesus' other message is clear too. The Kingdom is not just for the Chosen People. God does not reserve his love just for the Jewish people alone, or bless only those who obey the Torah. God has compassion on gentiles and sinners, the poor and the rich, the outcast and the broken. Jesus told stories of healing and compassion and the main characters were not Jews but sometimes those who were despised and treated with contempt. In Pope Francis words:'

"I have a dogmatic certainty: God is in every person's life. Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, even if it is destroyed by vices, drugs or anything else – God is in this person's life... You have to trust God."

Nor is it only for Christians. The Kingdom of God is much broader than the Christian church – it includes, at least in principle, all human beings, in other faith traditions. We have all responded in various ways to God's call and thus the Kingdom is within. "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions" for they "often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men and women" (*Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, #2).

When we pray, "Thy Kingdom come," we are praying that we might have the gift to see that the Kingdom may exist in individual human hearts, that it may exist in groups who gather in the name of Jesus, in groups and institutions and people that work to bring about 'life to the full' for all people, believers or otherwise.

Regards
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