

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
(1 Kings 3:5.7-12 / Matthew 13:44-52)  
30.07.2017

## The Kingdom of Heaven

The theme of today's gospel is "the kingdom of heaven". The gospel of Matthew uses the expression 'kingdom of *Heaven*' where Mark and Luke's gospels use the expression 'Kingdom of *God*'. The two expressions are similar, but Matthew uses the word 'heaven' instead of 'God' out of deference for the Jewish audience to which his gospel was addressed, remembering that the Jews don't pronounce 'the Holy Name' out of respect for it. In the Semitic tradition, to call someone by his name implies that we know that person, that we have a relationship of familiarity with her, or even of domination over her. But God is transcendent, always beyond, anything we could ever control He is the all-other. For this reason, Jews don't pronounce 'the Holy Name': instead they replace it by the name of the place where the Lord lives: and so they speak of the kingdom of heaven and not the kingdom of God.

What does Jesus mean when he speaks of "the kingdom of heaven"?

The kingdom of heaven is not a country or a geographical entity; it is not a place; it is not like 'the kingdom of Mourne' for example.

The kingdom of heaven is not an historical or a political entity, as when we speak of 'the United Kingdom', for example.

The kingdom of heaven is what happens when God is recognized as Lord and King by people who believe in Him and do his will.

The kingdom of heaven is what happens when and where the gospel message is put into practice by a group of believers.

The kingdom of heaven is what happens when and where there is a web of human relationships made up of love, respect, forgiveness and service which are the gospel's principle values.

The kingdom of heaven is a manifestation of God in the world.

When we pray, as Jesus taught us, saying: "Lord, may your kingdom come", we mean: May more and more people believe in God and do his will which is to love!

Jesus is the only one who succeeded in doing the will of God his Father during his whole life time without ever deviating from it by falling into sin. His life was an illustration of the gospel lived to the full. By the same token, Jesus' life was the inauguration of the Kingdom of heaven on earth. We can even say that Jesus is the Kingdom of heaven in his person at least in its germinal point.

The Kingdom of heaven developed through the community founded by Jesus, as long as his disciples tried to model their lives on the gospel. In this sense, we enter into the kingdom of heaven through baptism. But it is not because we are baptised that we are a member of the kingdom of heaven. We have to live according to the gospel day after day.

The kingdom of heaven is present in the Church-institution, but cannot be reduced to it, because the Church-institution is made up of sinners who don't always live according to true gospel values.

Having said that, the kingdom of heaven is also present beyond the frontiers of the Church, wherever gospel values are lived out. Once again, wherever people love, respect forgive and serve one another, the Kingdom of heaven is there.

Those who put the gospel's values into practice and in whom we can recognize a manifestation of the Kingdom of heaven are an inestimable treasure, because through them we can see God. They are also a treasure because they are a living answer to the questions we so often ask ourselves and others: What is the meaning of life? What is God's will? How can we do it? To love, respect, forgive and serve one another is the answer to these questions; this is the treasure.

The kingdom of heaven is a precious pearl, something of great value and even something priceless, something for which we have to be ready to give all we have in order to acquire it. The kingdom of heaven is something more important than anything we have. When we discover that to love, respect forgive and serve one another is the way to happiness and peace, the way to life, we have found all that we need and seek in order to be fully human. The way forward is clearly mapped out in front of us.

The kingdom of heaven is a surprise which is given to us, like the treasure in the field. Imagine a poor man labouring in his field and finding a treasure!  
At the same time, the kingdom of heaven is something we have to search for, like the merchant looking for a pearl.

The kingdom of heaven is something we have to seek out and something which is given to us. It will not be given to us if we don't seek it. It is not something we can give to ourselves. It is always God who has the initiative, but He needs our collaboration for his kingdom to come because he respects our liberty.

Like Solomon, we have to ask the Lord for wisdom, for a discerning spirit, for right judgment, for a heart able to understand how to distinguish between good and evil, how to love, respect, forgive and serve one another. This is not always easy; this can be exacting; it can even be painful at times, not to say crucifying. We need wisdom and strength from above.

The kingdom of heaven is offered to each one of us. We can sell all that we have to acquire it, or we can decline the offer for now. We can choose to love, respect, forgive and serve one another now, as we are loved, respected and forgiven by the Lord, or we can delay our engagement to do this. The Lord is patient. But there will be a day when we shall have to give an account for our lives. Let us not delay in our response to the invitation addressed to us. Let us commit ourselves to the Lord and to one another here and now. May the kingdom of heaven come through our lives! Amen.