

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
(1 Kings 3:5.7-12 / Matthew 13:44-52)  
30.07.2023

## **The Kingdom of Heaven**

Dear brothers and sisters,

The gospels tell us that Jesus opened his proclamation of the Good News with these words: “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand” (Mt 4,17). The Good News preached by Jesus is the coming of the kingdom of Heaven. What does Jesus mean when he speaks of the kingdom of Heaven? The first thing to say is that the kingdom of Heaven is not a geographical place like the Kingdom of Mourne for example. The kingdom of Heaven is a mystery and a mystery is beyond definition. The Gospels never provide us with a clear definition of the kingdom of Heaven. But Jesus tells many parables to help us get a sense of what the kingdom of Heaven is like: The kingdom of Heaven is like this... The kingdom of Heaven can be compared to...

Fundamentally, the kingdom of heaven, also called the kingdom of God, is where or when God reigns. The kingdom of heaven is when and where God is listened to and obeyed, when and where God’s will is done. The only place where God reigns is Jesus. The only place in which God’s will is perfectly done is in Jesus, the Son of God, who came to reveal the Father’s love for humankind and who remained faithful to his mission until the end, right up until his passion and his death on the Cross. In other words, the kingdom of heaven is the person of Jesus in whom the Father’s will is totally accomplished, and who, by his teaching, tells us what God’s will is for us and how to do it.

Today’s gospel passage proposes three parables to help us comprehend what the kingdom of Heaven is like: the image of a treasure, the image of a man looking for fine pearls and the image of a dragnet. Let us linger over each one of these images.

The kingdom of Heaven is compared by the Lord to a treasure hidden in a field. This treasure is the Lord himself who is hidden in the field of our heart. The Lord tells us in Luke’s gospel: “The kingdom of God is within you” (Lk 17:21). The man who found the treasure had not set out looking for something. So this treasure was an unexpected gift in his life. The presence of the Lord within us is a gift which we have to receive with gratitude. The three persons of the Holy Trinity live within us: the Holy Spirit obviously, the Spirit of the Son praying to the Father with words pleasing Him, and the Spirit of the Father revealing His will to us, but also the Father and the Son. In John’s gospel, Jesus tells us: “Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we shall come to him and make our home in him” (Jn 14:23).

That presence of the three persons of the Holy Trinity within us is the treasure hidden within our heart. To enjoy this treasure we have to renounce all the other treasures we possess to focus all our attention on the treasure of the Lord’s presence within us, through prayer, unceasing prayer, and through Lectio Divina which is a prayerful reading of the Scriptures. It is to such preferential

love for Christ that St Benedict refers to in his Rule for monks when he invites them “to prefer nothing whatever to Christ” (RB 72:11).

Nevertheless, it is a fact that we have many other treasures in our lives, treasures that we didn't receive from God, but which we have given to ourselves. We can ask ourselves: What is my treasure today? What has the first place in my heart today? Is my treasure God's loving and saving presence? Is my treasure the precious, or better the priceless presence of God which is something we should never forget but always remember? Or is my treasure myself, my own will? Is my treasure something which enslaves me? Or is my treasure something which sets me free, free to respect, love and serve my neighbour? The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field... like the presence of God hidden in our heart...

In the second parable, Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. It suggests that the kingdom of heaven involves the act of 'looking for' or 'seeking'. In the same way that, with the psalmist, we “seek the face of the Lord” (Ps 26, 8), we have to seek the kingdom of heaven, to set out in search of it again and again. We have to seek the kingdom of heaven, and when we have found it, we have to seek it again. To seek the kingdom of heaven is to engage ourselves into an unending process. The kingdom of heaven is a mystery we shall never possess completely, a mystery we shall never fully master. The kingdom of heaven will always be for us an unfinished symphony. If we want to seek the kingdom of Heaven and find it, we have to be a man or a woman of desire. We have to be inhabited by a deep desire for God. We might ask: Are we inhabited by a deep desire for God? Or are we going through the motions of life without thinking too much about what we are about?

In the third parable, Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea that brings in a haul of all kinds of fish. This is a reminder to us that we were all created in the image and resemblance of God and that we are all called to participate in the life of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us consent to be caught by the dragnet. After that, comes the sorting out. Here the good fish are separated from those which are of no use. This is a reminder to us that we are walking toward a judgement – the Last Judgement –, in which we shall have to render an account of our lives. The kingdom of heaven is a gift offered to all. It is a gift that we have not only to receive but also to make bear fruit in our lives. It is not enough to welcome the presence of Christ, We have to listen to him and seek to do his will. We have to put into practice what he tells us to do through his word. The gift of the kingdom of Heaven is an invitation to bear fruit.

With Jesus, let us pray to the Father: “Lord, may your kingdom come”! May your kingdom come within us! May your kingdom come through us in the world today!