

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT FAR AWAY, BUT HERE AND NOW

July 20, 2008

16th Ordinary Sunday

Page 1

"My power is made perfect in [your] weakness." [2 Corinthians 12:9]

A. WISDOM 12:13,16-19-- The Context. Most scholars date this book somewhere during the 1st century B.C. from within the Jewish community in Alexandria. The author's purpose in writing was to strengthen the faith of Jews who were questioning the relevance of their ancient faith, traditions and practices in the face of pagan Greek culture, i.e. Hellenism. [RG 218]. **Today's portion** recalls God's justice and clemency in response to unfaithfulness & **reminds the people that those who are just must also be kind.** [TCB p. 812]

B. PSALM 86:5-16--The Context. This psalm is an individual lament and recalls that **God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in kindness and fidelity.** [TCB p.706]

C. ROMANS 8:26-37—The Context: Paul wrote this book between 56-58 A.D. from Greece to stress salvation and justification through faith in Christ. [RG 397] **Today's text** affirms that the glory that believers are destined to share with Christ far exceeds the sufferings of the present life. **The Spirit comes to the aid of suffering believers to strengthen their weakness.** [TCB 240]

D. MATTHEW 13:24-43--The Context: Matthew was a Greek speaking Jewish convert living at the end of the first century in Antioch, Syria and writing to a Jewish audience around 70-90 A.D. [RG 314] **Today's pericope** recounts **three "kingdom" parables: the weeds among wheat, the mustard seed and the yeast.** Their theme is the certain triumph of the Kingdom. The parable of the weeds warns the disciples **not to anticipate God's final judgment by excluding sinners** from the Kingdom. The mustard seed and the yeast parables illustrate the amazing contrast between the small beginnings of the kingdom and its marvelous expansion. [TCB p.305]

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO ME PERSONALLY TODAY?

TODAY SEES A CONTINUATION of last Sunday's Gospel reading from chapter 13 of Matthew on the parables of the Kingdom. The Gospel speaks not about a far-away heavenly world, but very emphatically about the world in which we are living NOW. **The Kingdom represents the kind of world that God, through Jesus, wants to see realized among us here on earth.**

Matthew speaks of the "kingdom of heaven" out of respect for his Jewish readership who did not like to use the name of God directly. "Heaven" in Matthew then is a euphemism for "God". Mark, writing for a different readership, has no problems speaking about the "kingdom of God".

"Kingdom" in the Gospel does not refer to a place, either here or hereafter. The Greek word *basileia* is better translated as 'kingship', or 'reign', or 'rule', so some translations speak of the 'Reign of God'. **The Kingdom** is primarily an environment, it is a set of relationships; it **is a situation where God's values prevail.** And what are God's values? These values include **truth, love, compassion, justice, a sense of solidarity with all other human beings, a sense of trust in other, a deep respect for the dignity of every other human person, a holistic concept of human growth and development.**

People who, individually and collectively, try to live these values belong, with Jesus, to the Kingdom of God. They are united with the rule of God in **trying to build a world we would all like to see happen.** It is very much something for the here and now. **It is basically the vocation** of the Church, and therefore the vocation of every parish community and **of every member of that community.** At the same time, we need to recognize that the **Kingdom extends beyond the Church.** There certainly are people, who may not explicitly know Christ or express allegiance to Christ, **who yet live the ideals and the values of the Kingdom in their lives.** A prophetic character like Gandhi must surely be such an example. On the other hand, **we cannot say we belong to the Kingdom simply because we are baptized, but only in so far as the vision of the Kingdom is an effective factor of our daily living.**

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Page 2

The first parable, of the weeds among the wheat, reminds us that the Kingdom of God clearly calls for a great measure of tolerance, patience and understanding in seeing the Kingdom become a reality. The conversion of our societies into Kingdom-like communities is a very gradual process. There is always the danger that, when people try to take God or the good life seriously, they become elitist. **We, Christians, simply as Christians, can feel superior to people of other religions or none.** As Catholics we can talk disparagingly of Anglicans, Protestants, Evangelicals, New Age groups or charismatic groups, Legionaries, Bible study groups, social action groups or those who only show up at Christmas midnight Mass.

We must guard against sanctimoniously setting ourselves up as judges of others. Hence, today's parable far from being remote touches on deep areas in the lives of all of us. The parable is saying that **people who are filled with the vision and values of God and Jesus must learn to live side by side with a whole spectrum of people** who, in varying degrees, do not yet share or live this vision and these values.

We can go even further. **Each one of us is a combination of wheat and weeds.** In each one of us there are elements of the Kingdom and elements that are deeply opposed to it. Paul recognized that struggle within himself (cf. Romans 7:21-25). So **we need to learn how to be tolerant with our own weaknesses.** God told Paul that it was precisely through his weaknesses that he could reveal his glory. "*My power is made perfect in [your] weakness*" (2 Corinthians 12:9). The parable of the mustard seed shows that the work of the Kingdom has tiny beginnings. But its growth even amidst opposition is inevitable.

In the third parable, the Kingdom is compared to a small amount of yeast in a large batch of dough. Perhaps part of our Christian problem is that we are too exclusively concerned with the growth (or even the survival) of the Church in general and not **sufficiently concerned with the growth and well-being of the whole community to which we belong.**

To sum up, the three parables speaks about the development of God's Kingdom among us:
a. The good and bad, the strong and the weak, the clean and the corrupt will rub shoulder to shoulder both inside the Church and its communities and outside it.
b. No matter how small the beginnings, if we are faithful to the spirit and values of the Kingdom, we can be sure that apparently difficult obstacles, threats and even dangers can be overcome.
c. A Kingdom-community, even though very small, can exert a real influence on the growth of the environment of which it is fully a part and be instrumental in spreading Gospel values of the Kingdom as the accepted values. [Frank Doyle, S.J.]

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Are Jesus' values of truth, love & respect for others dominant in my life?

How will I guard against the tendency to set myself up as a judge of others?

What am I doing to foster the well-being and spiritual growth of my community?

How will I use my talents to advance God's kingdom in my community?

[Sources: Scripture readings- *The Catholic Bible, NAB translation, Home Study Edition, (TCB), and its Reading Guide (RG)*; *The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, [JSB]* Jewish Publication Society; *The Jerome Biblical Commentary, (JBC)* 1968 edition; *Dictionary of the Bible (DB)*, J.L.McKenzie, SJ; *Daily Study Bible Series, John (DSBS)*, Wm Barclay; *Sunday Scripture Reflections* by Frank Doyle, SJ at <http://www.sacredspace.ie/livingspace>; 16th Ordinary Sunday. [Compiled by Michael Hosemann].