

The Kingdom of God

... behold, the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you. ~ Luke 17:21

IN PRAYING THE OUR FATHER, we express as our own Jesus' yearning: "Thy Kingdom come ... on earth as it is in Heaven," through the acceptance of "thy will be done" (Mt 6:10). The Almighty intends that the Kingdom of God must reign in Heaven and on earth.

The Kingdom of God in Heaven existed from all eternity and will never cease to be. It is God's own realm of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). The faithful angels are blessed to be with God in this Heavenly Kingdom (see Dn 7:10; Rv 5:11). The ineffable goodness of God has promised that human beings who freely choose to do the will of the Father while on earth will one day people his Kingdom forever. This is the awesome, indescribable joy that "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived" (1 Cor 2:9), for this is what God has prepared, from all eternity, for those who love him.

How does this Kingdom come to be? Jesus Christ, the Son of God in human form, came to car-

ry out the Father's will "to raise up men to share in his own divine life"¹ (CCC 541). The gathering of men and women around Jesus was the beginnings of the Church, "on earth the seed and beginning of that Kingdom"² (CCC 541). Throughout his public ministry, Jesus called people to himself by his teaching and his miracles, and began even before his death

to send out his disciples (see Lk 9:1-6; Lk 10:1-11). The definitive call is his own Passion and death, about which he told his apostles: "I, when I am lifted up from

the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12:32).

Jesus calls every person to his Kingdom. He first sought out "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10:6), but following his Resurrection he instructed his apostles to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). He told the scribes and Pharisees who were scandalized that he ate with sinners, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mk 2:17), and on another occasion told them of the Heavenly rejoicing that occurs when a sinner repents (see Lk 15:7). Jesus also tells us that the King-

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An RCIA group

¹ Lumen Gentium 2

² Lumen Gentium 5

dom of Heaven will be given to those who are poor in spirit and are persecuted for righteousness' sake (see Mt 5:3,10). He was himself poor from his birth (see Lk 2:22-24, when Jesus' parents "redeemed" him with the offering of the poor), to his death, when he was executed like a common criminal or a slave. During his public ministry, he never had a home of his own, and he often slept without a roof over his head (see Lk 9:58). And when he came into Jerusalem in triumphant procession the Sunday before he died, it was the poor and the children who greeted him with jubilation (see Mt 21:1-9), while the scribes and Pharisees looked on with disdain (see Mt 21:15).

The condition to enter the Kingdom of God is a conversion of heart that changes our behavior as well, as we learn in Jesus' explanation of his Parable of the Sower and the Seeds: *"But those that were sown upon the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold"* (Mk 4:20). The measure of our fruitfulness is our care for those in need (see Mt 25:31-46). And it is these to whom Jesus' message is especially addressed: those who are poor, captive, blind, and oppressed (see Lk 4:18).

The Kingdom of God in Heaven, then, is gained through our sojourn on earth — through our active pursuit of God's will in our lives. To help us here on earth to reach this divine objective, our merciful and omniscient God, through his Son, has provided the moral law and supernatural means that give us hope and support in our journey toward the eternal. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem and his Passion, death, and Resurrection marked the beginning of his final acts to make present his Kingdom to all those on earth who seek him (see CCC 560).

The most all-embracing means to

"The Catholic Church is the realization on earth of the Kingdom of God."

Heaven is what God the Son accomplished in establishing his Church. The Catholic Church is the realization on earth of the Kingdom of God, Christ's very own conception and creation, and it belongs entirely to him. In his great work *City of God*, St. Augustine declared that "the Church even now is the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven."

A twentieth-century writer, Karl Adam, has said that, "The Church is the new supernatural reality brought by Christ into the world." The Apostle Paul identifies the Church as the Body of Christ (see 1 Cor 12:12-27). Even though it is *in* the world, Christ's Church is *"not of this world"* (Jn 18:36). It is his Kingdom, animated by the Holy Spirit, which grows like the mustard seed (see Mt 13:31-32), leavens the world (see Mt 13:33), and, like a field of grain, harbors both the wheat and the weeds until the day of judgment (see Mt 13:24-30).

It is the duty of the Christian to be united with the visible Church, says St. Ignatius of Antioch in his early second-century *Letter to the Philadelphians* and *Letter to the Ephesians*. Acceptance of Jesus for who he is, living in conformity with all his teachings, loving others as he loves them and us, resisting the evils of the hostile kingdom that surrounds us — in a word, being in his Church, the Kingdom of God here and now, is what God expects of us. In lovingly living up to the way, the truth, and the life (see Jn 14:6) and thereby assuring that his will be done, we will move from the visible kingdom to the eternal divine Kingdom of life everlasting (see Dn 7:18). We will enter into the joy of our Lord (see Mt 25:21, 23).

(CCC 541-546, 559-560, 776, 2796, 2816, 2819)

Open Your Heart, by Timothy Schmalz

