

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Aug 30th 2014

The Reign of God and Our Role in It

The parable of Jesus in Matthew's gospel today refers to the Kingdom of Heaven. "The Kingdom of Heaven," for him, is the same as "the Reign of God" in the other Gospels. Matthew uses "Heaven" because his community is made up of Jews who have become Christians. He is sensitive to what they are used to. They rarely refer to God as God, because they regard the word God as sacred. So they used circumlocutions speaking of God, as does Matthew in today's Gospel. His readers who left the Jewish community to become Christians knew full well he was referring to God.

When Jesus speaks of the Reign of God, He proclaims God as the living God, acting concretely, in our history and now. The kings, emperors, and presidents of our world and throughout history may hold sway for a time but, like Ozymandias, their reign eventually crumbles. The reign of our God perdures. It begins with creation, is actively present now, and will continue to be active, guiding us and our world until the end of time and into His eternal Kingdom.

God's Reign is His creative love for each of us personally, and for all of us collectively. It prevails when each of us personally, one by one, and all of us together as a world-wide community, let God's love take over in our lives. What does today's parable from Matthew tell us about the Reign of God?

The master, leaving on a long trip, portions out his fortune to three servants. Two realize the master wants a return on his capital, so they invest it and double it. When he returns, he praises both because both gave him a 100% return. The third servant, however, buried the money for fear of losing it. The master is outraged. He was angry because the servant had allowed fear to paralyze him. So afraid was he of losing money that he did not even take the very modest risk of depositing it in a bank.

The Lord has entrusted a fortune to us: material resources, natural talents, spiritual gifts, and the Gospel. He expects us to grow them. In the last supper discourse (John 15) He speaks of the disciples as bearing much fruit. In the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, He speaks of grain that bears 30, 60, and 100 fold. Whatever labor we are involved in—economic, family, apostolic—the goal should be to develop, increase, and grow what God has given us, for his honor and glory.

This involves taking risks. It means not letting fear of failure stop us from pursuing success. The Acts of the Apostles frequently uses the Greek word *parrhesia*, meaning cheerful boldness in the face of danger or opposition. Without such boldness, Christianity would have stalled in Palestine. It never

would have made it to Antioch, Greece, Rome, and us. Faithfulness to God means having courage to take bold initiatives, in pastoral life, family life, and business -- to be creative, even entrepreneurial, to express our gratitude for all God has given us by making it grow.

At the end we will be asked, as the men in the parable were, “How did you use the gifts I gave you and how productive were they in furthering the growth of the Kingdom?” Today then is a day for us to identify what those gifts actually are. Some people have never given it much thought. They see their Christian life in rather passive terms, just looking after themselves, living in conformity to the commandments of God and the Church, fulfilling their “religious duties,” making sure to die “in the state of grace”. To do only this, in effect, is to bury one’s talents.

So we are here and now called to continue to spread God’s love in word and deed, as best we can, wherever we can, no matter what the circumstances: To make sacrifices, to share our wealth, to be kind and patient, to be humble and poor in spirit, to be merciful and truthful, to be peace makers and one another’s servants. Let God be the judge as we confront injustice, greed, self-centered ambition and arrogant pride. To love others not just by what we say but by what we do. That is how we manifest and disclose that the Reign of God is at hand.

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