

Repent! The Kingdom of God is at Hand

By Fr. Robert J. Carr
©Catholic Online 2005

We can look at today's gospel and think, is the Kingdom of God at hand? What changes happened after Jesus made this statement? On the surface, nothing seems changed. The Earth is still here. We are still seeking today the same things people were seeking then albeit in a modern way. Where is the Kingdom of God?

WAS THE KINGDOM OF GOD AT HAND?

Yet, if we look at the reading more closely, we may see those who took Jesus' words lightly would be better off if they began to tremble. The Kingdom of God being at hand indicates that a major change is coming and people have a choice to be on the winning side of change, or the losing side of change. Those who repent are on the winning side of change. Those who refuse to repent end up on the losing side of change.

But what happens? From the very second that Jesus began preaching, everything that was considered the status quo began to fall apart. Jesus brought division in the community that eventually led to the total downfall of the whole nation. The Temple congregation became divided to the point that those who followed Jesus were cast out. The same happened to the synagogues-- the local communities outside of the temple. If you imagine the Temple to be like the Cathedral, the synagogues were like parish churches. Nothing is the same after this moment. The change begins virtually unnoticed, but within forty years the temple is destroyed. The political nation is gone and a new religion is rapidly changing the world. It all starts with these very words of Jesus. "Repent! The Kingdom of God is at hand."

A GOSPEL RED STATES VERSUS BLUE?

What is also fascinating is the words he speaks about Zebulun and Naphtali. These are areas that become Galilee. Galilee is to Jerusalem what Iowa is to New York City. Here is the home of the farmers and the

fishermen. They are the less sophisticated than the city dwellers. These are what Daniel Harrington in his Book *The Gospel of Matthew for the Sacra Pagina* series calls the "Hicks" in the eyes of the city dwellers. Yet it is these very people to whom Matthew speaks in light of Jesus' message. He is speaking to the common folk. That means you.

The leaders of the faith, at that time, have failed. They have allowed the religion to go stale, to lose its life giving qualities and to become dry and lifeless. Therefore, they will lose their position and others, the common folk, will take their place and, eventually, the gentiles. This is what produced the world we live in today.

The whole process begins with one sentence. Repent! The kingdom of God is at hand. These same words come over the millenia right to us today. The message is the same. Repent. The kingdom of God is at hand. It is spoken just as universally. We need to listen to it regardless of whom we may be; Jesus speaks to each one of us: Pope to catechumen.

WHAT KIND OF REPENTENCE MUST WE DO?

So we need to listen to those words as well. Repent!!! What is it we need to repent from. That is where we take an inventory of not only our lives, but also our community.

We need to repent from anything that leads us away from God. What are the attitudes and actions in our lives that Jesus would look at and say Repent!.

One of the greatest things I think we need to look at is our use of television. You do realize that television entertainment is for people who do not live exciting lives. By that I mean, you watch crime shows to experience what it is like to be a detective. Yet, the time you spend watching crime shows could be spent helping someone out of a life of crime and into the heart of Jesus by growing in the transformational love that can change hearts, minds and souls. Or it could be spent building community in our parishes and our families so none of our loved ones in parish and family become susceptible to the temptations of the easy fix, whatever that may be. We cannot settle to just be entertained by someone else's words when we are called to live a life as exciting in Christ has in store for us.

Complacency, where do we allow God to be pushed aside by secular attitudes. Where does the secular world enter our lives and make us complacent, taking the excitement out of our faith. Listen to the words,

"There is a new morality now." We form the new morality being complacent and using that complacency to dull our understanding of wisdom and light in the "old Morality". It dulls our senses to the presence of Christ and makes us less sharp in our spirituality. It needs to be eliminated from our lives.

Our sense of sin needs to be examined. Every leader toppled by Christ in these words felt he was living his faith correctly. That is because he had a faulty sense of sin. Bishop Fulton Sheen used to say that in some households a man could get drunk in a bar, get into a fight, drive home, and greet his family drunk and go to bed. He would then add that as long as the person did not have sex with anyone but his wife, then people believed he did not sin. That is silly. But it is an accurate description of some people's sense of sin. Is your sense of sin based on the two commandments love the Lord you God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself?

Look about you and see where sin is rampant. See where it is oozing out of walls and out of floors. Look at Fathers and or mothers who do not parent their children. They can be either emotionally absent or physically absent. The key is that they are absent. That is sin. Look at how many Catholics do not go to Church feeling they live good enough lives. Jesus says elsewhere that apart from him we can do nothing. Yet, with him we can bring out changes of hearts so powerful that they are beyond the comprehension of the worldly folks. We can love to a level of holiness that we actually do God's work, we actually do God's will; yet only if we are connected to him. When we walk the path alone, we not only walk into sin, we help spread it.

If we truly want to understand social sin, we need to look at our world with the eyes of the passion of Christ and see where the love of Christ is needed. This does not just mean money; it means his transforming love and passion that each of us are commanded to live.

WE ARE THE BRANCHES, HE IS THE VINE

Jesus taught over and over again that when the leaders no longer serve the purpose of their God they are replaced with those who do. In this gospel he reminds us that the Spirit has fallen on all the people. That means you and me from Catechumen to Cardinal. Let us allow our hearts to be on fire for God; let us become branches to his vine. Let us allow him to show us where repentance is needed. Let us be open to the act of repentance for the kingdom of God is at hand. Which side are we on?