

**Rev. Kevin V. Madigan**  
**Church of St. Thomas More, NYC**  
**July 11, 2021 8:30 a.m.**  
**15th Sunday of Year B**

In today's Gospel we see Jesus giving His disciples their marching orders---they are to go out and announce coming of the "Kingdom of God." They are to "preach repentance" and to "drive out demons." What precisely is the "Kingdom of God?" It is not a place like the United Kingdom or the kingdom of Nepal; it is not some sacred institution such as the church; it is not where we hope to go when we die--heaven. The kingdom of God is what happens when human beings open themselves to the love of God; it is what happens when the compassion of God, the mercy of God begins to change the way that people look at themselves, at each other, and at God. Jesus says to His disciples "the Kingdom of God is within you, is among you." The Kingdom of God is found in those spaces between people when we open ourselves to each other and act in a truly loving, compassionate, just way. It is not just a matter of thinking Godly thoughts, but of doing Godly things.

Likewise "repentance" it's more than simply to stop doing "x" this and to start doing "y," because "x" is labeled bad and "y" is considered good. I think the best way to get a handle on what repentance means is that scene from the movie Moonstruck, when Cher yells at her love-sick suitor, "Snap out of it!" Jesus' call to repentance is asking us to snap out of all those societal and cultural givens of our day that in one way or another are destructive to human beings and human relationships. Jesus is asking us to wake up and see that there is another way, a better way to live one's life--one wherein I am not caught up in a web of false assumptions and expectations that are at root hurtful to the human spirit.

To "drive out demons" is more than to create a scene reminiscent of the movie, "The Exorcist." First, it is necessary to have a sense of what the "demonic" is, and that is not red-suited, horned creatures with pitchforks. It is to recognize the presence of evil so real that cannot be explained away by euphemisms such as "errors in judgment" or "mistakes were made." It is a force that seems at times to be supra-human in its capacity to destroy lives, yet, at the same time, very personal in the manner that hurt is inflicted on individuals. Jesus sends out the Twelve to do what He has been doing--to announce that the healing presence of God is breaking into the world in a new and dramatic way, so that people can be liberated from any taboo, judgment, practice or institution that would diminish their worth and value as children of God.

This demonstrates that the ministry of Jesus is in continuity with all the prophets of Israel who came before Him. The role of then prophet was not so much to foretell the future as it was to remind the Israelites what they had forgotten about their tradition, specifically a tradition of social justice, of concern for the poor and the outcast. The task of the prophet was to remind them how they had failed in their mission to be a people, a civilization, a society, which was different from their pagan neighbors. Understandably, when the prophets arrived on the scene, they were not always welcomed by those in power. The prophets were unsettling because they disturbed the "status quo." So, someone like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was in the line of the prophets of old because he tried to remind Americans of what we said we believed in the Declaration of Independence and the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

The miracles that Jesus performed and that He empowered His disciples to perform were part of that same prophetic ministry. It was the circumstances under which Jesus performed these healings that upset the official religious teachers and the Temple priests. It was the kinds of people He healed, how He healed them, the fact that He was healing on the Sabbath. They were more than displays of Jesus' divine power; they were signs pointing to what the Kingdom of God was all about; that if God was indeed working through Jesus, then God was eradicating the neat distinctions in which people had for so long set apart those who was worthy and unworthy, who were pure and impure, who were clean and unclean. Now, it was as if in God's sight these distinctions did not matter at all.

Because Jesus cured precisely those were considered not worthy of the attention of a real miracle- worker, His opponents refused to accept who He was, and what He was all about. They would not "repent," they would not snap out of it; they would not give up all their biases, prejudices and judgmentalism, their vested interests, which prevented them from acknowledging in God was indeed acting in their midst in the person of Jesus. In the miracles that Jesus performed, He was trying to teach something very important--that the old order was passing away, that humanity need no longer be enslaved by society's practices that made victims of some, so that the more powerful could have their way. On the hill of Calvary, Jesus, the innocent victim, dies in solidarity with all those who have been victimized throughout human history, so that His own Holy Spirit, bestowed on His disciples on Easter Sunday, might empower them to continue the very work that He had been doing with them.

As Jesus sent the Twelve, today He sends us--to do precisely what He did--to confront the evils of our day, to heal a broken and bleeding world, to be signs of the presence of the kingdom of God--not to be governed by the old order, by so many of the destructive patterns of our society, wherein people continue to be victimized,

where people are chewed up and spat out, so the oligarchs, the 100 families who control a disproportionate amount of the wealth in our nation, can have their way. We are to be the signs, the agents of God's Spirit at work to transform a broken and demonic world, insofar as we have the opportunity, in ways small or large, to be part of the Gospel mission. In the Eucharist we will welcome Him who died so that there need not be innocent victims anymore. May we be open and receptive to His presence, and to His practice.