

HOMILY - SUNDAY 16 A

“Live in the Kingdom”

(Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; Psalm 86; Romans 8:24-27; Matthew 13:24-43)

A French Canadian preacher started his homily one Sunday this way: “Today we’re going to talk about the hell – what the hell it is; where the hell it is, and how the hell to get there!”

Today, precisely the opposite is appropriate – let’s talk about the heaven, and how to shine like stars in the kingdom of the Father. That is the message from today’s gospel: strive to be righteous and live in the Kingdom of Jesus.

A first thing to note is that the main theme of Jesus’ preaching is the Kingdom of God. And when it comes to teaching about such a lofty topic, Jesus most often turns to the use of parables: C.H. Dodd, in his book *The Parables of the Kingdom*, shares a beautiful definition of a parable.

“A parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness and leaving the mind to sufficient doubt of its precise application to tease it into active thought.”

The gospel today presents us with three parables about the kingdom, one after the other, precisely to open us up to the mystery and the marvels of the reality of the reign of God breaking into our daily lives.

The mustard seed and yeast are surprising, even shocking images of the kingdom. The Jews used unleavened bread, since they considered yeast to be impure and unclean. For Jesus to use yeast as an image of the reign of God is intended to be as unsettling as for the Father to use his Son crucified on a cross as the way to initiate that kingdom among us. So first and foremost, we must set aside all our preconceived ideas and notions, and be open to the Kingdom of God appearing in our midst in surprising, unexpected ways.

The parable of the dandelion gives us the way to live in the Kingdom, now that we are more aware of its mysterious nature. We are to be inclusive and non-judgemental. We must resist the temptation to exclude and judge, like the Pharisees. We are to repent and attend to our own personal healing journey.

It is the height of the farming and gardening season, and a garden for me, has always been a metaphor for the spiritual life, for life in the kingdom of God. Allow me to share with you what I call the spirituality of weeding.

We are the seed that is planted in the soil of faith and fellowship. Because of the lack of love in this wounded world that begins to affect us even within the womb before our birth, we begin to sink deep roots of insecurity, anger, jealousy, stubbornness, resentment, false pride, etc. These are all painful emotions and negative attitudes that we could call sinfulness – that which makes us sin. As we grow up in our somewhat dysfunctional and imperfect family systems, we learn unwritten

rules such as: do not talk; do not feel; do not trust. Unable to deal with our inner pain, we begin to transmit that pain. We begin to act out of our painful emotions and do hurtful actions that harm and affect others, starting with those closest to us. Lying, stealing, swearing, cheating, fighting are where it begins. This moves on to abusing alcohol, drugs, sex, etc. The litany is all too familiar.

Our task is to break this cycle of violence through repentance and forgiveness. This is not about others – we did not cause them, we can't control them and we can't fix them. We can't even really transform ourselves. We can at best grow in faith in our living God, become more aware of our own need for forgiveness of what we have done wrong, and for healing of the deep rooted defects that cause us to do wrong. In other words, we need to be about weeding our own gardens, not those of others. We need to be on our own personal healing journeys of faith, self-awareness, forgiveness and healing. We can let God take care of others until the harvest.

The point is clear: up until the parousia, the church will always be a mixed bag of good and evil; it should not play God by trying to purify itself completely through purges and inquisitions. The definitive separation must be left to the last judgment. It is the church's part to preach repentance and practice patience.

The 12 Step program of Alcoholic's Anonymous is a very practical way to live out these parables of the kingdom and the darnel. Four of the Steps have to do with self-awareness, with being able to name and deal with our own inner reality, our own sin and our own sinfulness, that which makes us sin. Four of the Steps help us grow in faith in God's love for us and God's power to heal us and restore us to wholeness. And finally, four of those Steps help us to heal our relationships with others, especially with those we have hurt, as well as with those who have hurt us.

Corbin Eddy shares an example in his commentary on this Sunday's gospel of living the parable of the darnel. He was on a subway when he noticed two weirdly dressed obnoxious kids who were loudly acting out right in front of an elder sister. His first reaction was instant revulsion, dislike, a desire to get them off the subway and teach them a lesson. Then he noticed the sister make the sign of the cross, pluck up her courage, and begin a friendly conversation with the two outlandishly dressed youth. He was immediately mortified, realizing that he had wanted to pull out the weeds and get rid of them, and that the elderly sister had done just the opposite – accepted the youth as they were and tried to befriend them. He had just seen today's gospel in action.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a humble meal, a hidden mystery, a faith transformation event that invites us to be open to the mystery of the Kingdom, and live in that Kingdom by being humble, inclusive and non-judgemental.

So today, let us respond to the gospel call – let us strive to be righteous and live in the Kingdom of Jesus.