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## The reign of God is a treasure

by Thomas Gumbleton

The Peace Pulpit

As we begin to listen carefully to our Scriptures of today, it's important to remind ourselves what we mean by this Reign of God. Sometimes it's called the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, but the Reign of God is really the best terminology because when you say Kingdom of God or Kingdom or Heaven, you think of a place. That isn't what Jesus is talking about. When He began His public life, He said, "The Reign of God is at hand. Change your lives." It's something that we can enter into, a relationship, if we change our lives. One Scripture commentator has described the Reign of God as the dynamic rule of God's saving or healing love, that which makes us whole and all that we can be. That's the Reign of God.

There are a couple of places in Paul's letter to the Romans in the passage before the passage we heard today where Paul is kind of overwhelmed by what he has experienced and he's sharing this with the people he is writing to in Rome, those first Christians. He wants them to try and get a sense of the extraordinary love that God has for us, what it really means. He says, "Consider that when Jesus died for us, we were still sinners, in an ordinary way. Few people would accept to die for an upright person, a very good person, but perhaps someone would give their life for such a person, but look how God has manifested His love for us while we were still sinners. When we were still sinners, it was then that Jesus died for us, that He showed us the way of love, when we were still sinners."

~~Seven Gifts Sunday in Ordinary Time~~  
~~1 Kings 3:3, 5-7~~  
~~Psalms 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130~~

Romans 8:28-30

It wasn't that we had ever earned this love of God. Jesus loved us and God loved us way before we ever loved God. That's put so clearly and so powerfully in the first letter of John that we find in our Scriptures. "My dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. This is love, not that we loved God, but that God first loved us. Dear friends, if such has been the love of God, we too much love one another."

Matthew 13:44-52

Full text of the readings

No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and God's love spreads freely among us. This is where we begin to understand, I think, what we mean by the Reign of God.

Every one of us can -- and it would be important to do this -- why am I here? It is only because I have been loved into existence by a God who first loved me. I couldn't earn God's love. It's not a prize that I get as a reward. No, God first loved us, loved us into existence, and that love of God never stops. God is always loving us unconditionally, without limit. So this is what we mean by the Reign of God. It's entering into that dynamic relationship of love where we begin to experience that we've been loved by God, and God continues to love us without limits, without end, without condition. Today's parables tell us a little bit more about what happens and how it happens when we enter into this dynamic relationship.

The first parable is a story about probably a poor person, a peasant, one who was a laborer and not rich in any way, probably someone who was digging a well or a hole for a fencepost. Likely, it was a poor peasant, a hired day laborer at the bottom of the social scale. All of a sudden, he comes upon this buried treasure, and when he discovers it, he buries it again, and then goes and gets rid of everything he has so that he can buy that field and the treasure is his. He's overwhelmed with joy at his discovery, and the main point of this short parable is the joy that fills the person's life when the person enters into the Reign of God.

It's an overwhelming joy and a joy that, as Jesus said at the Last Supper, "I tell you this so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete and never end." I saw a movie recently that's called *Of Gods and Men*, and it's a marvelous movie, one of the most faith-filled movies I've ever seen or I think has ever been made. It's about a Trappist monastery in Algeria in the 1990s where a terrorist outbreak had begun to happen. It was a time of turmoil, violence and terrorism, and the monks were undergoing severe stress because they were being threatened. Some people were telling them to leave.

They were from France and they could go back there. Their whole struggle was should they leave or not leave? The movie takes you through their experience, but finally they had decided to stay after all the struggles. There is a scene in the movie towards the end and the violence is just about to come down upon them. They have a beautiful meal together, and obviously it's a suggestion of the Last Supper. You can sense the deep joy that they experience, even though they're aware of what is about to happen. They are also filled with some sense of sorrow and loss, but overwhelmingly, there is a sense of joy. They found that treasure that was hidden in the field.

So when the monastery is invaded and they are taken away, there is a scene where they were walking. It's really the Way of the Cross, going towards their full union with Jesus in His suffering, death and then resurrection, but they've discovered this joy. The Reign of God has come into their lives. The next parable about the pearl of great price, this was probably a rich person making money on the backs of the poor, the divers who were in his employ. Often merchants in the Scriptures are pictured kind of negatively, but this particular merchant has been searching for the finest pearls.

It has been a long, long search, and the point of this parable is that sometimes when we're struggling to enter into the Reign of God, we must keep searching and searching. At some point, we pray and it will happen. We find that pearl of great price. Nothing else is important any longer, only to follow the way of love, to enter into this dynamic relationship of love with God, entering into the Reign of God even now as we live our lives here, and then of course, into the Reign of God forever. The point of the parable is that it's a long search, and none of us can know exactly when suddenly we will have that awareness of God first loving me, and the awareness of what the Reign of God really means.

Some of us probably have been blessed because we can understand God's love because we've had the love of a mother or a father whose love is unlimited, unconditional, a fierce love. So we can picture God

as a loving mother or a loving father, and our search begins to come to a conclusion because we know this love of God, the pearl of great price. Then the final parable today reminds us that we're all at a different point. The net pulls in all kinds of fish, those that are still struggling, those that are searching and then those who have entered into the Reign of God.

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It's not up to us to make judgments about any of the others. They are engaged in their struggle and search. We pray for them and we pray for ourselves if we're still at that point where we haven't really entered into the Reign of God. The main point of this parable is that only God can judge. Only God knows the struggles that people are undergoing, the search. I have met people who tell me, "I just don't have any sense of God in my life. I wish I did." They're searching. They haven't found this Reign of God yet. Maybe some of us are struggling along that path, too. We must be patient with ourselves and with one another for God's Reign to come into its fullness.

As we conclude our reflection on these parables, this is the last Sunday we're going to be hearing parables about the Reign of God. I suggest that we make it a special point to pray with great fervor what Jesus teaches us when the disciples asked Him how to pray. They saw Him praying and they were very impressed and desired to know, "How do we pray?" We know what He taught us, but the one phrase, "Thy kingdom come," is the Reign of God. We should be very alert to this as we say that prayer. Pray that the Reign of God will come into my life, that I will enter into that beautiful relationship with God where I know that God's love is what rules my life, where I enter into that love where I try to carry out that kind of love.

We pray with great fervor to enter into the Reign of God: Thy kingdom come in my life. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "The Reign of God is at hand." It can come into the life of each of us, but also it's that transforming love of God that will transform our entire world, all of creation into the fullness of God's reign. Our work is to enter into the work of Jesus to make the Reign of God happen, to transform our world into as close an image of the Reign of God as possible. So we pray with fervor: Thy kingdom come for each of us, for all of us, and for all of creation. I'm sure that when we pray for that with great fervor, we will come to know, at some point very profoundly, that the Reign of God is present in my life. I've experienced that love of God and with it comes what Jesus promised: "I tell you this so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."

[This homily was given at St. Anne Parish, Frankfort, Mich.]

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