

Catholic

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WHAT IS 'THE KINGDOM OF GOD'?

A theologian explains the key image of the Gospel and
the message at the center of Jesus' teaching and ministry.

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There was a time when the word *kingdom*—like *fellowship* and *ministry*—was viewed by many Catholics as belonging to the Protestants and, hence, as being less than center stage in the Catholic tradition. Many Catholics even today, therefore, might be surprised to learn that the kingdom of God is at the heart of Jesus' preaching.

If they were asked to summarize the point and purpose of Jesus' life, they probably would say he came "down" from heaven to pay the price of our sins and then went back "up" to heaven after the Resurrection. They might add that we have the Church to keep alive the teachings and instructions of Jesus and to make available the treasury of grace he won on Calvary.

But Jesus did not come among us primarily to establish the Church. His main mission was to promote and manifest the kingdom of God. He entered our midst to proclaim that the kingdom of God is close at hand (Mk 1:15), to call us to conversion and repentance (Lk 10:13–5, 13:1–5, 19:41–44); Mt 11:20–24), and to urge us to be watchful and ready for the kingdom (Lk 12:35–40; Mt 25:1–13).

What is this kingdom of God that so preoccupied Jesus? Certainly not a kingdom in the worldly sense. "My kingdom does not belong to this world" (Jn 18:36), Jesus insisted.

The Kingdom of God exists wherever God's will is at work. And God's will is at work wherever people are faithful to the command that we love one another as God first loved us.

THE KINGDOM IS 'GOD'S REDEMPITIVE PRESENCE'

We can define the kingdom of God as the redemptive presence of God. This redemptive (or saving) presence of God can be found in everyday personal experiences. Whenever people love one another, forgive one another, bear one another's burdens, work to build up a just and peaceful community—wherever people are of humble heart, open to their Creator, and serving their neighbor—God's redemptive and liberating presence is being manifested. God's kingdom and loving rule are in operation there.

Jesus indicated this when he told the crowds, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. . . . Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness; theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3, 10). God's redemptive presence is surely at work in them.

Because there is no limit to the presence of God, the kingdom of God has no boundaries. The kingdom may exist in the individual human heart, in groups, in institutions, in nature, and in the cosmos as a whole. The kingdom of



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In what ways can you help bring about the kingdom of God?

What do we learn about the kingdom from Jesus' life and ministry?

How do you view the Church's role in the kingdom?