

Homily for February 12 and 13<sup>th</sup> 2022  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time  
*To what kingdom do I belong?*

The story is told of Frederick William IV, who was king of Prussia from 1840 to 1861. One day he visited a school and quizzed the students. He held up a stone and asked the children: to what kingdom does this belong? They responded: mineral. He then, pointed to a flower and asked: to what kingdom does this belong? They answered: plant. He then pointed to a bird flying by outside the window and asked: to what Kingdom does that belong? They replied: animal. Then he asked: Now, to what kingdom do I belong?

He had raised a profound theological question. To what kingdom do we belong? In a scientific sense, we are, of course, part of the animal kingdom. I belong to the same kingdom as my dog Yogi. He has many human traits. He can pout, he can get excited, he has a temper. But, Yogi does not understand time. He cannot grasp that there is a point beyond which he will not live. Only humans can grasp time. His limited mind cannot set goals. Yogi cannot tell right from wrong. It is not within him to share. It is not within him to sacrifice for another. All of those are human traits. The magnificent thing for humans is that it is within us to rise above purely animal desires and become a part of another kingdom----the Kingdom of God.

It is the Kingdom of God of which the Apostle St. Paul speaks in our reading from 1 Corinthians. For this early Christian community, they affirmed the Resurrection of Jesus as a historical event, but they did not yet see how it would influence their own ultimate destiny. St Paul is unequivocal in his teaching. The Resurrection of Jesus is the sign of our own destiny. While death is a curse that is the consequence of the decay and disease that will affect all our bodies, the Resurrection declares that we are being saved from the curse of death to share in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. If this is not true, St Paul says bluntly:

***your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. <sup>1</sup>***

In other words, if the Resurrection of the Body is not our destiny than in answer to the question, “To what kingdom to I belong”, is the animal kingdom.

From the ancient days of the Jewish people, they reflected on this question, and even through they did not have the full teaching of the Resurrection from the dead as developed by St. Paul they understood that there are two answers to this question of our kingdom affiliation.

This is clearly expressed in both today’s psalm and Jeremiah text. We can summarize the teaching of these passages this way. To belong to the kingdom of heaven means being brought by grace from the world’s curse into heaven’s happiness.

We are so to speak under a curse when we conclude that we are no more than sophisticated animals whose existence will terminate at death. Jeremiah says it like this:

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version\*](#) (1 Co 15:17–19). (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.

*Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals  
and make mere flesh their strength,  
whose hearts turn away from the LORD. <sup>2</sup>*

Our psalm makes the same point more boldly when it declares:

*Happy are those  
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers;*

But notice what the psalm is stating. Those are happy who do not follow in the path of those who turn away from the Lord, described here as the wicked, sinners and scoffers. Rather the happy ones are those whose minds, and hearts are inspired by the teaching of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, they are the ones who:

*delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law they meditate day and night.  
3 They are like trees  
planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper*

Listen to what the 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian St Athanasius who wrote about these verses:

The splendid brilliance of God's grace never suffers an eclipse. No, it is always at hand to enlighten the inner thoughts of those who really want it. Great good comes to people who, enlightened by the grace of God, make it their habit to apply the truths of holy Scripture to their lives. They receive just such a blessing as the psalmist describes.... Those blessings come because the person who accepts God's grace is not illumined by mere physical light from the sun, the moon or even the whole host of stars. Rather, he glows all over with the radiant brilliance of God.<sup>3</sup>

We see this radiant brilliance most fully in the teaching of Jesus, whose words can at times seem hard to understand.

Take for instance the words of Jesus in today's Gospel. On a superficial reading they may seem very strange. For he declares that those are blessed and happy who are poor, hungry, sorrowful, and hated; and cursed will those be who in the present are the rich, full, laughing, and respected by others.

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version\*](#) (Je 17:5). (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>3</sup> FESTAL LETTERS 5.1.

What in the world is Jesus getting at here? I think it is this. If we are satisfied with success and worldly contentment, we will not desire more than what this world has to offer. If, however we take to heart Jesus' words about embracing suffering as a key dimension of life in this world, we will live with a deepening longing for God and his kingdom. When this happens, we will be less satisfied by all temporal goods and increasingly hunger to be satisfied by eternal goods.

Jesus is teaching us that we can only be open to grace when we are never satisfied with the happiness this world can offer and accept suffering as a gift that gives us clarity of vision as to what really matters. For Jesus does want us to know to what Kingdom we belong – His. And in knowing this we can give thanks that we are being saved by grace from the world's curse into heaven's happiness.