

THE HOLINESS AND KINGDOM OF GOD

[Italicized quotes – Pope Francis – General Audiences on Feb. 27 & Mar. 6, 2019]

The first set of requests in the Our Father focus us on God as the holy King whose will directs the universe. When we pray “Hallowed be thy name,” we should feel Jesus’ admiration for the Father’s greatness and his wish that everyone see and love him for what he truly is. And we pray that we reflect the Father’s holiness to our world.

It is God who sanctifies, who transforms us with his love, but at the same time we too, with our witness, manifest God’s holiness in the world, making his name present. God is holy, but if we, if our life is not holy, there is great inconsistency! God’s holiness must be reflected in our actions, in our life.

God’s holiness is made present in the person of Jesus and radiates into our world, overcoming evil and giving us the strength to take possession of our inner house. Prayer drives away all fears and gives us this certainty: God loves me; Jesus gave his life for me; the Spirit is within me.

After praying for the sanctification of God’s name, we continue, “Thy Kingdom come.” This desire was central for Jesus, who proclaimed from the start, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15).

These words are in no way a threat. On the contrary, they are a blessed proclamation, a joyful message. Jesus does not want to press people to convert by sowing fear of God’s imminent judgment or a sense of guilt for the wrongdoing committed. Jesus does not proselytize: he simply proclaims. Rather, what he brings is the Good News of salvation, and, starting from this, he calls us to convert.

Jesus invites us to believe that God’s authority has drawn near to his children, whom he loves and teaches the path of holiness. Jesus gave many positive signs of the coming of God’s Kingdom – care for the sick, the poor, the socially excluded (e.g., lepers or sinners). The miracles he worked pointed to the presence of the Kingdom. Yet our world is still filled with sin, with suffering people, with unforgiving people, with war, hatred and the exploitation of others. Christ’s victory over evil has not been completely attained.

It is above all in these situations that the second request of the “Our Father” emerges on the lips of Christians: “Thy kingdom come!”, which is like saying: “We need you, Father! We need you, Jesus. We need you, Lord, to be everywhere and for ever, in our midst!” “Thy kingdom come, may you be in our midst.”

We sometimes wonder – why is this Kingdom so slow to come about? Jesus often used parables to explain that God’s Kingdom doesn’t fit our worldly criteria. He likened it to a field where both wheat and weeds were planted. As both sprout, our impulse is to pull the weeds, but Jesus warned that doing so would uproot the wheat as well. Let both grow and at the harvest, the weeds can be separated out and burned.

God is not like us. God is patient. It is not through violence that the Kingdom is established in the world: meekness is its means of propagation.

The Kingdom of God doesn’t appear to be controlling the world, but it is like leaven that is kneaded into flour – it’s not seen, but it spreads and makes the dough rise. Or it’s like a mustard seed – very small, but it grows to a large tree.

In a way, Jesus was a living parable of the Kingdom. He was an almost unknown event to the official historians of his time. He was that grain of wheat he described, dying so as to bear much fruit. The symbol of the seed is eloquent – its sprouting and growing is more the work of God than the farmer who planted it. God is always ahead of us, always surprising. Thanks to him, the night of Good Friday is followed by the dawn of the Resurrection, able to illuminate the entire world with hope.

“Thy kingdom come!” Let us sow this word in the midst of our sins and our shortcomings. Let us give it to the people defeated and bent by life, to those who have tasted hatred more than love, those who have lived aimless days without ever understanding why. Let us give it to those who have fought for justice, to all the martyrs in history, to those who have come to the conclusion that they have fought for nothing and that in this world evil always dominates.

We will then feel the prayer of the “Our Father” respond. It will repeat those words of hope for the umpteenth time, the same words with which the Spirit sealed all the Sacred Scriptures: “Yes, I am coming soon”: this is the Lord’s reply: “I am coming soon.” Amen.

“Thy kingdom come” is like saying “Come Lord Jesus.” And Jesus says: “I am coming soon.” And Jesus comes, in his way, but every day. We have trust in this. And when we pray the “Our Father”, we always say: “Thy kingdom come”, in order to feel him say in our heart: “yes, yes, I am coming and I am coming soon.”