

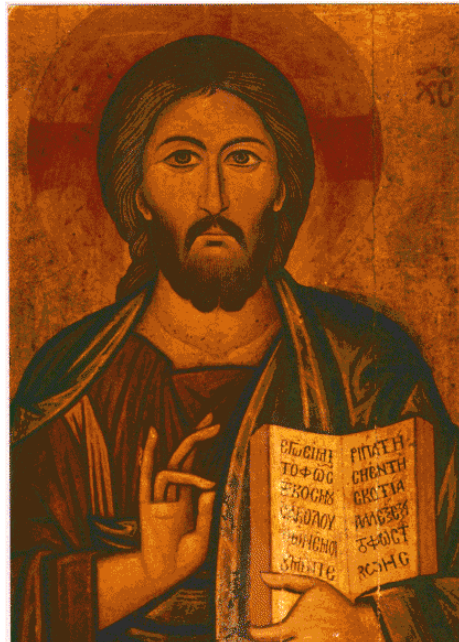
13th Sunday after Pentecost, 2007

“And after that John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.”

(Mk. 1; v 14–15)

After John the Baptist was arrested, Our Lord, the Messiah, came preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. And in Mathew 4.23 we read, “and Jesus went about all Galilee ... preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom.” Here and elsewhere both Evangelists speak of the preaching of Jesus with the Greek term *evangelion* — but what does it actually mean? What follows is gleaned from *Jesus of Nazareth*, by Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI.

Recently, in our times, *evangelion* has been translated as the “Good News”; while this sounds attractive it falls far short of the magnitude of what is actually meant by the term. The Roman emperors, who considered themselves as lords, saviours and redeemers of the world, used the Latin *evangelium* in their messages whether or not their content was cheerful and pleasant. The idea being that what comes from the Emperor is not just a piece of news but a saving message that would change the world for the better. What the Evangelists are telling us is that what the Emperors, who pretend to be gods, illegitimately claim, really occurs here — a message endowed with plenary authority; a message that is not just talk, but reality. In other words the Gospel is not just the imparting of information, but action, efficacious power that enters into the world to save and transform. When the priest kisses the words of the Gospel he says: “Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be blotted out.” And does not the congregation with the priest recognise the presence of God in the Gospel: at the beginning, making the sign of the Cross on forehead, lips and heart, we proclaim: “Gory to Thee, O Lord”; and at the end: “Praise to Thee, O Christ” — thus recognising the presence of God in His Sacred word. It is here that God’s word, which is at once word and deed, appears; what the emperors merely assert but cannot perform, here truly takes place. For here, it is the real Lord of the World – the Living God – who goes into action. The core content of the Gospel is: “The Kingdom of God is at hand.” The phrase *Kingdom of God* occurs 122 times in the New Testament as a whole: 99 times in Matthew, Mark and Luke; and 90 of these texts report the words of Jesus. But what is the Kingdom of God?



Origen, one of the early Fathers of the Church, basing himself on the reading of Jesus’ words, called Jesus the *autobasileia*, that is the Kingdom in person. Jesus Himself is

the Kingdom — Jesus leads men to realise the overwhelming fact that in Him God Himself is present among them, that He is God's presence. The same father of the Church, in his treatise on prayer says: "Those who pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God, pray without any doubt for the Kingdom of God that they contain in themselves, and they pray that this Kingdom might bear fruit and attain its fullness." Did not our Lord tell us, "The kingdom of God is within you." The kingdom of God then is not to be found on any map. It is not a kingdom after the fashion of worldly kingdoms; it is located in man's inner being. It grows and radiates outward from that inner space. So if we want God to reign in us then sin must not be allowed in any way to reign in our mortal body¹. Then let God stroll at leisure in us as in a spiritual paradise; and rule in us alone with His Christ.

That way we can truly pray; truly communicate with God in His Christ. And when we pray "Thy Kingdom Come," our perfect prayer means that Christ should rule in us; have full dominion through the Holy Spirit in our souls.

As we learned in our childhood Catechism, Prayer is the raising up of one's mind and heart to God. If we knew the gift of God that prayer is; and always remember it is a gift from God, our heart and mind would be set on seeking only what is good. As with the Samaritan woman, Christ comes to every human being and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts, His asking arises from the depth of God's desire for us. Whether we realise it or not it is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts, that we may thirst for Him. The simple doctrine of prayer is developed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Sacred Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit; but most often (more than a thousand times) of the heart. It is the heart that prays; if our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.

The "heart" is the dwelling place where I am, where I live; according to biblical expression the heart is the place "to which I withdraw". The heart is our centre, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ. In the New Covenant prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with His Son, Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. The grace of the Kingdom is "the union of the entire holy and royal Trinity ... with the whole human spirit". Do we not find this in St Patrick's *Lorica* or "Breastplate":

*I bind to myself to-day
The strong power of an invocation of the Trinity,
The faith of the Trinity in Unity,
The Creator of the elements.
I bind to myself to-day
The power of the Incarnation of Christ with that of His Baptism.*

Thus the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with Him. This communion of life is always possible because through Baptism we have already been united with Christ. Prayer is Christian in so far as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is His Body. Its

¹ Romans, 6.12

dimensions are those of Christ's love. Communion means “being one with” in totality — one in mind, heart, and intent — making His thoughts our thoughts.

We need the power of Mary’s prayers; she was the one and only human being in whom the King lovingly reigned in the fullness of grace; the Holy Spirit made this clear to us in the sacred writings: “And Mary kept all these things in her heart and pondered them” — not as sentimental memories; there was nothing of nostalgia in this; but undistracted union with her Divine Son in the prayer of contemplation and thus she perfectly reflects His love and compassion. That is why we give her the title, *Seat of Wisdom*. Let us seek that perfect communion with Christ in our own hearts by imitating His Holy Mother.

Our Holy Father Benedict XVI, in the conclusion of his encyclical *God is Love*, gives us this prayer:

*Holy Mary, Mother of God,
You have given the world its true light,
Jesus, your Son — the Son of God.
You abandoned yourself completely to God's call
And thus became a wellspring
Of the goodness which flows forth from Him.
Show us Jesus. Lead us to Him.
Teach us to know and love Him,
So that we too can become
Capable of true love
And be fountains of living water
In the midst of a thirsting world.*