

The Teachings of Jesus

It is quite an impossible task to reduce the teachings of Jesus, even in summary fashion, to the confines of this flyer. Rather than attempt a complete summary of everything, we might consider together several of the more important themes in the teachings of Jesus.

The Kingdom of God

The theme of the Kingdom of God is perhaps the most central theme in Jesus' teaching. In fact, the very first thing said by Jesus as he began his public ministry was this, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Mt. 4:17). Likewise, in summarizing the ministry of Jesus Matthew writes, *And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people* (Mt 4:23).

Well, what is this kingdom and where can it be found? The Kingdom of God does not permit such easy questions and answers. Jesus said as much: *Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." And he said to the disciples, "The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, 'Lo, there!' or 'Lo, here!' Do not go, do not follow them. For as the lightning flashes*

and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of man be in his day.(Luke 17:20-24)

No other passage shows so well how difficult it is to get an exact reading on the Kingdom of God! Jesus says it is here (in our midst) but it is yet to come in all its fullness. When it does, it will come suddenly like a bolt of lightning. For now, the kingdom is not perceived by the five senses but it is perceived by faith.



The double aspect of the kingdom of God as a present reality and a future reality is most apparent in the parables of the kingdom (e.g. Mt 13; 18:23-35; 20:1-16; 25:1-13; Mk 4; Lk 8:4-18; 13:18-21). The kingdom is the preaching of the word. The kingdom contains both the good and the bad; it grows to greatness from imperceptible beginnings; it is a treasure for which a person should trade all his possessions. It

imposes obligations of love and forgiveness. It admits all comers, it demands an alert readiness and presents a challenge to each person which cannot be evaded: whether to accept the sovereignty of God or not, for the Kingdom of God is synonymous with the execution of the will of God (Mt 6:10; Lk 11:2). If a person accepts it he or she must accept the revolution it imposes in one's life.

In some passages the Kingdom of God seems to be identified with the person of Jesus himself in whom the kingdom comes (Mt 16:28; 21:9; Mt 9:1). In other passages it is also clear that the Kingdom of God is the Church (Mt 13:38; 16:19; 21:31ff). In still other passages the kingdom refers to the time in the future when Jesus, the Son of Man returns in all his glory and fully establishes his reign as an eternal kingdom (Mt 13:41; 16:27). The righteous shall shine like the sun in the kingdom (Mt 13:43) and receive their due rewards (Lk 12:32).

So what?

At a practical, daily level however what is the Kingdom of God? It is the sovereignty of God in our lives. Who is it that rules your life? Is it the Lord or is it some other false and passing ruler such as power, money or the flesh? The Kingdom of God is also the present blessing that we experience. For those who possess the kingdom there is a joy and inner peace that this world cannot destroy: *I'm so glad I'm walking with the King, walking up the*

King's highway.

Love is the Fulfillment of the Law

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. (Mt 5:17) These words of Jesus introduce us to another important theme in his teaching: Love does not cancel the law, it fulfills it.

At the time of Jesus, the Scribes and Pharisees prided themselves on being observers of the law. Jesus was critical of them not for the fact that they observed the law but for the fact that this was all they did. Though they followed many laws they interpreted them in the narrowest, least restrictive sense. That is why Jesus instructed his disciples, *For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 5:20). Although the scribes and Pharisees taught the love of fellow countrymen they permitted the hatred of enemies. Jesus taught, we must love our enemy (Mt 5:43-44). Though revenge was permitted by Mosaic Law, Jesus excluded it (Mt 5:38-40). Though many interpreted the commandment not to kill only as a command against murder, Jesus understood it in its fulness to exclude bitterness and unjust anger as well (Mt 5:21-22).

Jesus thus gave us an important teaching regarding the moral law: fulfill it. To fulfill something means to fill it full, to see all its implications and live them. This is because we are called to live in love. Love does not ask, "What's the least I can do and just get by?" Love always asks, "What more can

I do?" Love is extravagant.

An illustration

A young man in love with a young woman does not ask, "What is the cheapest gift I can get for you on your birthday?" Love does not ask such questions. The young man will naturally want to buy a fine gift that will please his beloved even if it involves a sacrifice. Likewise, if he loves her and she asks him to do something, he will do so gladly even if it is difficult or means he will have to change his plans. Love is like an energy. It makes us eager to please and gives us the strength to do what is asked with joy.

Here then is what Jesus teaches: love God, let God love you. If you do this you will not only keep the law, you will fulfill it. In the new order of grace we receive the very life and the very love of God within us. If this is the case then need to understand what kind of fruit this love will bear. The fruit will be the joyful fulfillment of all the implications of God's law. And this fulfillment will not be more difficult, for the love we receive from God is itself the very power by which we will do what is required. Because we love and are loved we will joyfully undertake even great sacrifices.

Thus, love is the greatest commandment for it implicitly contains every other law. A man who loves his wife does not need a law to command him not to break her arm. He already knows this if he loves her. Thus Jesus teaches: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is*

like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. (Mt 22:37-40)

The Universal Call

Another important teaching of Jesus is that everyone is called to holiness and to the kingdom. Many of the Jews of Jesus' day excluded Gentiles from God's blessings. But Jesus moved beyond such exclusions and categories. He praised many Gentiles for their faith (Mt 8:10; Lk 17:18) and told parables that instructed his fellow Jews that they were living in a way that made them unfit for the kingdom. Therefore God was inviting others (Mt 22:1ff). Jesus also spoke with Samaritans (Jn 4:7) and even used Samaritans as heroes in his parables (Lk 10:33). Finally, when he sent the Apostles forth he instructed them: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.* (Mt 28:19-20) In doing this Jesus made a major break with the culture of his day. He gave a clear teaching that there could be no place for man-made distinctions, partiality, bigotry or racism. All were invited by God to the Kingdom. The word "catholic" means universal. It is one of the four defining marks given the Church in the creed. Therefore when we call our Church "Catholic" we are declaring that all are invited to faith in Christ Jesus. Whoever will accept his call to believe is to be admitted with joy to the Church.