

Manna 3 – Third Session

The Kingdom of God is at Hand: Eucharist and the Kingdom of God

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*May the Eucharistic kingdom of our LORD come
and may we be its first disciples and fervent apostles.
No more individualistic pursuits,
no more efforts wasted outside (the scope) of our great mission.*

-January 10, 1864

Letter to Fr. Alexander Leroyer, SSS

from Saint Peter Julian Eymard

Preface

On many of the letters Father Peter Julian Eymard wrote, he would put A.R.T. at the top of the letter (the way many of us put J.M.J. [*Jesus, Mary and Joseph*] or A.M.D.G. [*All for the honor and glory of God!*] at the top of our tests and homework). It stands for *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* – “May your Kingdom come.” For indeed, the coming of the kingdom of God was a mission priority at the top of Father Eymard’s list. He longed to *bring about the beautiful kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth!* (Letter to Mrs. Natilie Jordan, January 1, 1855) And to another religious confrere of his, Father Raymond De Cuers, SSS, he wrote in late 1864, “*Adveniat Regnum Tuum*. This is my continual prayer.”

For Father Eymard, the coming of the Eucharistic kingdom had both individual and societal implications. He saw the Eucharist at the center of one’s personal spiritual life as the way to make a gift of one’s whole being to Jesus Christ. And amidst the political upheaval and the religious indifference of his day, Father Eymard saw the Eucharist as a great source of societal revival. He wrote in a religious journal in July of 1864, “May this reign of the Eucharist come more and more; long enough have impiety and ingratitude reigned on the earth!”

Father Eymard saw the Eucharist as the way to love and unity. He longed, as Saint Paul did (Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17), that all Christians would form “one single body.” For as the sacrament of unity, the Eucharist holds out the promise of reconciliation, justice, sharing and community.

It is at the Eucharist (the Mass) that we remember how God loved us. Jesus’ hope for humankind: “This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater

love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. This I command you: love one another (John 15:12-17)."

What a society we could have if we each followed this commandment on a daily basis. *Adveniat Regnum Tuum!* May the Eucharistic Kingdom of God come!

Introduction to the theme

Today we will be discussing the relationship between the Kingdom of God, Jesus' central message throughout the gospels and the Eucharist. The institution of the Eucharist has long been said to be the culmination point or the ritual summary of Jesus' own life, death, and resurrection.

A friend once volunteered for the preparation of First Communion for young children in a public school. Coming from a government school, they had little or no catechism at all. It was no wonder then that she found great difficulty in communicating to them the idea of the "kingdom of God," which had been chosen as the diocesan theme of the year.

Three weeks before the celebration, she got an idea of portraying the kingdom as a kind of ice cream party. Wishing to know whether it would work out, she sat down with her niece and went through the whole format she had planned out. "It's just like an ice cream party; the only difference is that there is a constant supply of all the favorite flavors you love. It's not the usual 'good while supply lasts,'" she emphasized.

Her plan worked out as she expected. On the final day of preparation, she brought the children to church to attend a Eucharist. Later, she asked her class if they had seen the kingdom in their experience. One courageous boy raised his hand and said matter-of-factly, "No, with all those people rushing to receive Jesus, you'd think Jesus just might have run out."

A confrere used to teach the Eucharist in a theological school. One time he confessed that with all his studies and preaching experience, the kingdom aspect was the most difficult to comprehend. One day near Christmas while walking along towards a drugstore, he was approached by a nine-year old child who was so severely malnourished, she appeared to be half her age. Recognizing the confrere as a foreigner, she begged for some change. He loathed giving money, so he proposed buying her something to eat instead. "Would you like an apple?" Her pitiful eyes lit up. "An apple? Certainly!" He noticed, however, that she didn't eat it as he expected but just handled it like a treasure. "You don't like it? Why aren't you eating it?" he asked. "On no," she replied, "I love it, but I want to bring it home and share it with my sick brother and mother," she replied. It was only after this experience that the real value of the Eucharist dawned on him. It came to him like a thunderbolt – the Eucharist is a sharing of God with us and a sharing of ourselves with others.

The two previous stories point out that unless the kingdom of God is manifested in our day-to-day experience, then the celebration of the Eucharist becomes meaningless, or an ironic ritual opposed to gospel values. An experience of the kingdom is essential in order to move towards a mature appreciation of the Eucharist we celebrate.

Opening Prayer

O God, you sent your son Jesus to be the bearer of good news – to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, and the good news to all, especially the poor. Your Son called this mission the proclamation of your kingdom. Christ set this out before us: by his preaching, by miracles, but above all, by Christ’s life, death and resurrection.

In the Eucharist, Jesus Christ left us a memorial of this saving event. Your Son was totally captivated by this mission, a mission compared to fire burning within Christ’s body and with which Christ wished the whole world were already kindled. At his last meal, the Lord gave the Eucharist also so that we might be constantly challenged to bring the kingdom to its completion.

By the gift of the Spirit, you continue to nourish and inspire us with this mission – our Eucharistic mission – to respond to the demands of building up a world freed from sin and rooted in love, justice, and peace.

O God, send us today your grace to be your saving presence to transform the world and society, to be food to nourish the hungers of humanity and to be catalysts in a liberating relationship of persons and societies.

We ask you this through your son, Jesus, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen.

Song Options

- “The Summons,” by John Bell
- “One Bread, One Body,” by John Foley, SJ

Work Exercise

1. What would be your response if someone approached you and offered to ***reign/rule*** over you – to have control over your life? On what do you base your acceptance or rejection of such an offer?
2. The kingdom of God is both a present reality and a future hope. When do you remember having had a kingdom-experience? What particular moment in your life did you feel convinced that it is present to you now? What do you imagine it to be when completed?
3. The Eucharist proclaims the marvels God has accomplished in our history. (Rule of Life 24 for the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament). Do your celebrations proclaim, even at a minimum, a personal or communal experience of salvation, or do they still remain on the level of passive ritual? Be specific by sharing a personal experience.

The work exercise is followed by a small group sharing and a large group sharing.

Teaching

1. The Eucharist cannot be understood unless it is read against the background of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. It was patterned after an ordinary Jewish Passover. But it did not remain just at that level. It is a summary of Jesus' life. We can say that Christ left us his picture through a meal.

Within this perspective, we can say that the Eucharist is his last will and testament through which his work is to go on living and operating beyond his death (W. Kasper). As a summary of Jesus' life, the Eucharist is a memorial, a portrait; as last will and testament, the Eucharist takes on the character of a future hope (eschatology).

2. Biblical scholars agree that Jesus did not preach about himself. The topic of Jesus' teachings was not himself nor God alone; it was God in relationship to the world (J. Sobrino). Jesus was totally imbued with the reestablishment of the plan of God for his people. This vision he called the kingdom of God. But the kingdom does not remain simply as a promise in the future. "The kingdom of God is at hand," Jesus proclaims in Mark. The kingdom was made present and existential in the very life and ministry of Jesus.

It is difficult to define what it is. However, Jesus has given us some points with which it can be recognized. In Luke 4:16-20, he quotes from Isaiah, calling it the year of the LORD'S favor, the jubilee year. Further analysis of Isaiah 61 points out that this year of favor is the restoration of God's reign and the renewal of God's loving relationship through a new covenant (Note: Jesus blesses the cup at the Last Supper and calls it "the blood of the *new* and everlasting covenant.)

3. The kingdom of God is a gift, but it is at the same time a task. It should never just remain a vision; it must be experienced. In Matthew 11:4-5, John the Baptist's disciples asked if Jesus was the promised Messiah. In reply Jesus tells them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them." Hence, we can say that there are four points to be considered in trying to understand the kingdom.
 - a. The kingdom is meant for this world.
 - b. The kingdom means the transformation of the whole world.
 - c. The kingdom demands transformation of the present reality.
 - d. The kingdom is a challenge to human freedom.
4. The kingdom is truly meant for this world. The message of Jesus must be realized not only in the hereafter. In fact, the quoted pericope from Matthew points to an almost totally world-centered view. If we cannot encounter God in human history and in the world, then the incarnation was a total failure. In fact, the desire of God is to be Emmanuel, to dwell constantly with us. Hence, we can no longer continue to dichotomize the world and God.

Though God had chosen the world as his field of mission, there must be a recognition that this is a broken world. There is a need to transform the world, to bring it back to what God had initially planned for it. Salvation is not simply on a one-person basis. “The blood will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven.” Thus, transformation must occur on the personal level, but always with the whole of humanity in mind. Also, since humanity and the physical world cannot be separated (the world being the proper locus of humans), salvation includes all of creation and not humanity alone (Romans 8:20-23).

5. Transformation of present reality can begin only with the giving up of our present values. These must be replaced by gospel values, specifically the beatitudes. If a new covenant had been proposed, then we also must do our part. Human history is not something that happens arbitrarily; it is something which we consciously help to create. Human participation is an essential factor in the writing of our future history.

This entails respect for human freedom. This is our contribution as co-creators and participants in God’s plan. *Gaudium et Spes* (“Joy and Hope” from the Second Vatican Council documents) 39 says, “When we have spread on Earth the fruits of our nature and our enterprise – human dignity, [loving] communion and freedom – according to the command of the LORD and his Spirit, we will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom . . .”

6. In the Eucharist, our Christian mission is celebrated. We thank God for his son, who totally submitted himself to the values of the kingdom, an obedience until the cross. God’s nourishment, reconciling act, transforming power, abiding presence, and call to mission are presented once again as the focus of our faith. In the same way, each particular aspect had been part of the Christian experience. (These are the five themes in the “Life in the Eucharist Program – Sacramental Reflections.”)
7. The Eucharist is meant to be in and for the world. In spite of the brokenness of the world and human history, God chose to communicate and reveal his love through his son. In the Eucharist, we use the bread and wine (earth has given, fruit of the vine and work of human hands) in order to bring about the fact that the whole world, its history, action, and reality are consecrated to God.

Our celebration does not imply completion; it merely directs us towards the mission. Because at consecration we constantly use new bread and new wine, we cannot remain introverted, passive, and rooted in the past. Each new step in the making of our history becomes an opportunity for God to once again enter our lives and world.

8. By highlighting tiny bits of the kingdom values that are present in our world, and thanking God for them in the Eucharist, we are able to see possibilities for human history and the

world. The small bits of light, here and there, point out that transformation is possible when we give up our own independence and submit ourselves to God by adopting as our way of life the beatitudes, the way of life of Jesus. Sometimes we may be hampered by difficult situations, but that does not remove the hope for change.

9. The kingdom of God as the central message of Jesus and the way he lived his life is captured in the celebration of the Eucharist. At the same time, the Eucharist makes us recognize what we still need to accomplish so that our present reality may be able to become in fact the place and time where God continues to reign. Only when God's reign is complete can we totally eliminate all the evil of sin. Transformation, however, ought to begin now. And at each Eucharist the challenge faces us once again, while at the same time affirming us of what we have accomplished.

Resource helps for this teaching

- *Is the Last Supper Finished? Secular Light on a Sacred Meal* by Arthur Vogel. Sheed and Ward, New York, 1968.
- *Theology and Church* by Walter Kasper, SCM Press, London, 1989.
- *The Kingdom of God. The Message of Jesus Today* by John Fullenbach. Orbis Books, New York, 1995.

Closing Prayer

If in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, exposition is made during the opening hymn. When the hymn is concluded, the assembly kneels in silence for several minutes. During this silence, the community welcomes the presence of the Risen LORD before them in the Blessed Sacrament and within them as the LORD'S own body.

Opening Song: Lyrics of "The Kingdom of God is Within You," by Robert Rousseau

The kingdom of God is within you. The kingdom of God is within you. Deep within, God's presence is waiting for you. The kingdom of God is within you

The kingdom of God is within me. The kingdom of God is within me. Deep within, God's presence is waiting for me. The kingdom of God is within me.

The kingdom of God is within us. The kingdom of God is within us. Deep within, God's presence is waiting for us. The kingdom of God is within us.

Moment of Silence:

First Reading: Romans 14:12, 17-19

Period of silence:

Second Reading: John 14:8-13

Closing Prayer: *Together*

LORD our God, your kingdom is right among us,
hidden, yet nearby;
in a person to love
a person to live for.

Your will is done on earth
wherever people live and die for each other

We pray to you,
may this be what we do
from this day on.

May we find you in one another,
in the people we serve.

May we grow in steadfast and fearless love,
so that your kingdom of peace and justice
may come among us. Amen.

If in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Incensing of the Blessed Sacrament and the assembled community.

Benediction:

Reposition:

Closing Song: Together sing “The Lord’s Prayer”

Sign of Peace: