

# REPENT, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND.



## Sunday Reflection With Fr. Rafal

Dear Sisters and Brothers of St. Joseph Parish,

Today we hear the opening words of Jesus' public ministry: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Perhaps these words sound familiar. Well, they are exactly the same words John preached. (cf. Mt 3:2)

It seems like Jesus is a continuation of John the Baptist. In one sense that is true. Jesus does pick up where John left off. Still, in two important ways, Jesus gives a whole new meaning to John's words. The most significant difference is the person of Jesus. John was the last and the greatest prophet. Jesus, on the other hand, is God. He not only announces the kingdom; he brings it about in his person. With Jesus something new enters human history. This is major.

There is a second way that John's words have new meaning when Jesus speaks to them. Even though it is minor in comparison to the person of Jesus, it is nonetheless significant: John had been arrested. It was a whole new ball game. The situation for preachers had suddenly become a lot more dangerous. John's imprisonment looms over Jesus' public ministry.

As followers of Jesus, we do not stand on the sidelines and wring our hands. Jesus did not allow John's arrest to intimidate him. He picked up the prophet's message, "Repent." We have that same message. Now, I don't recommend going out on the sidewalk and telling people to repent. The first person we need to address is the one we see in the mirror each morning. In St. Paul's words, we have emptied the cross of its meaning. Let's face it: We admire the strong - the rich, the famous, the powerful - and we find the weak to be a nuisance. That attitude is poison. Repent.

The Kingdom of heaven is at hand. In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict asked, what exactly is the kingdom. The pope's answer is beautiful: Jesus is quite simply "proclaiming God and that he is able to act concretely in the world and in history and is even now so acting." Jesus is telling us, "'God exists' and 'God really is God,' which means that he holds in his hands the threads of the world."

Do you see what Pope Benedict is saying? If God holds the threads of the world in his hand, we have nothing to fear. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Early Christians calmly faced torture and death because they knew that God has the final word. At this very moment, in atheistic and Islamic countries, Christians are facing persecution. Jesus' words sustain them. What about us? Opposition to us is growing, but it is still minor by comparison. The danger we face is not so much to our bodies, but to our souls - and the souls of our children. That danger has increased in recent years. But even though the situation has changed, the solution is the same, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Have a Blessed Week!

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