



Mercy Advocacy

Thy Kingdom Come – 2013

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The heart of advocacy for us as Sisters is to seek to help build the kingdom of God. The following reflection on the petition 'thy kingdom come' is part of a book "The Lord's Prayer" by the Franciscan, Leonardo Boff, meditating on the Our Father. Let us pray the Our Father this year in particular for the dispossessed, refugees, indigenous people and for the homeless. Pray, too, this year that the 'engine room for advocacy that we are all seeking to create will be a support to our efforts to give witness to the kingdom of God.

With the supplication "thy kingdom come" we get into the very heart of the Lord's Prayer. At the same time, we are confronted with the ultimate intention of Jesus, because the proclamation of the kingdom of God constitutes the core of his message and the primary motive of his activities. In order to fully comprehend the meaning of this supplication – which burrows into the most profound depths of our anxiety and our hopes – we must begin at a distance and dig deeply. Only then will its radicality and novelty be appreciated.

The kingdom of God: this is the message of hope and joy proclaimed by Jesus. The word was not frequently used in the Old Testament (see Ps 22:28, 45:7, 103:19, 145:11; 1 Chron. 29:11; Dan. 2:44, 4:34, 5:26) and yet it constitutes (as *malakuta* in Aramaic) the verbal matrix of Jesus' message. "Kingdom" does not refer here to a territory but to the divine power and authority that now is in this world, transforming the old into new, the unjust into just, and sickness into health.

Jesus now provides the elements for a definition of the content of the kingdom. He uses parables that leave no doubt as to his meaning.

The figure of speech used most often is that of the house or city of God, where persons sit down to eat and drink (Luke 22:30; Matt. 8:11). The Lord invites guests to his table (Matt. 22:1-14). Some enter and others are ejected (Matt. 5:20, 7:21, 18:3, 19:17, 23, 25:21, 23). There are keys for entering (Matt. 16:19). Those who live there are "born to the kingdom" (Matt. 8:12). There are many dwelling places there (John 14:2). All are invited to this house and this table, even the servants, the crippled, and those who live on the margin of society (Matt. 22:1-10). They come from the East and the West and sit down at the table (Matt. 8:11). The just shine as brightly as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matt. 13:43). From this and other imagery one may gather that we are confronted by an absolute, fulfilled meaning, and that creation and humankind have arrived at this point.

There are three main characteristics of the kingdom announced by Jesus that have to be kept in mind. First of all, it is universal. It embraces everything; it brings liberation to such infrastructural dimensions as sickness, poverty, and death. It restructures interpersonal relationships characterized by the absence of hatred and a plenitude of fellowship. There is a new relationship with God, who is the Father of all his beloved children. The kingdom of God cannot be reduced to any dimension of this world, not even a religious dimension; Jesus

regards as diabolical any temptation to reduce the kingdom to some particular segment of reality, whether political, religious, or miraculous (Matt. 4:1-11).

Secondly, the kingdom is structural: it not only embraces everything but it also signifies a total revolution of structure. It does not merely modify the outlines of reality but goes to the roots and brings total freedom.

Thirdly it is definitive. Because it is of a universal and structural nature, it implies the end of the world. The kingdom defines God's ultimate and final will. This world in which we live and suffer is coming to an end; there will be a new heaven and a new earth where justice, peace, and concord among all of God's sons and daughters will finally triumph in the Father's great house. We can understand Jesus' exclamation: "Happy the eyes that see what you are seeing!" (Luke 10:23).

The kingdom of God is constructed in opposition to the kingdom of Satan and to the presently existing diabolical structures. Thus conflict is inevitable: a crisis cannot be avoided. We are urged to make a decision. The prime target is the poor. In them the new order becomes concrete, not because of their state of morality but merely because they are who they are – that is, the poor, victims of hunger, injustice, and oppression. Jesus with his kingdom wants to put an end to their degrading situation. The kingdom comes through the poor and in opposition to poverty which will have no place in it.

God revealed the final end of his work: the goal is to be his kingdom. Here is an ultimate, transhistorical goal that God is achieving despite human rejections. It is like the seed of the parable:

"A man.....goes to bed at night and gets up in the morning, and the seed sprouts and grows – how, he does not know" (Mark 4:26-27) Even rejection, the cross, and sin are not insuperable obstacles to God.

The cross of Christ is a demonstration of how persons, both individually and in groups, may be frustrated as they confront the ultimate meaning of creation. But God is powerful enough and merciful enough to transform this frustration into a possible path of realization. Creation in its totality is not derailed, because God will finally conquer and reign.

How will the kingdom of God come? For the Christian faith there is an infallible criterion that signals the arrival of the kingdom: when the poor are evangelised – that is when justice begins to reach the poor, the dispossessed, and the oppressed. Whenever bonds of fellowship, of harmony, of participation, and of respect for the inviolable dignity of every person are created, then the kingdom of God has begun to dawn. Whenever social structures have been imposed on society that hinder persons from exploiting others, that do away with the relationships of master and slave, that favour fair dealing, then the kingdom of God is beginning to burst forth like the dawn.

(Abridged extract from "The Lord's Prayer" - Leonardo Boff, 1979.)