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The love of God must surface within our spirits, hearts

by Thomas Gumbleton

The Peace Pulpit

We're all aware, I'm sure, that this coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, and I think if we listen deeply and carefully to today's lessons, we'll get some guidance on what we should be thinking about as we begin to think about how am I going to spend these six weeks. A special prayer and fasting and alms-giving, because it's important before we start the season of Lent to begin to have some kind of a plan as to what we will do, and again, today's lessons give us some direction.

But when I hear the Gospel lesson, I wonder a bit how it must sound to someone ? maybe even somebody here in church this morning who doesn't have a job, who's just been laid off, or maybe hasn't had a job for months and desperately looking for a job. Or someone who works full time and doesn't even make enough to be out of poverty.

How would a person like that hear today's lessons? It could be very difficult, but if we concentrate on one part of the Gospel lesson this morning, we'll see a way out of that difficulty ? where we can find hope ? because Jesus says a bit further along in the passage, ?Seek first the kingdom of God. Seek first the kingdom of God and all of these other things will follow.?



<p>If we're going to be really intent on seeking the kingdom of God, it's important for us to have a sense, ?What do we mean by the kingdom of God,? or sometimes in the Gospel it's ?Heaven. Both of those images give us an idea of a place, or kingdom of Heaven. But really what Jesus is talking about is what we, I think, more accurately would call the reign of God.</p> <p>The reign of God: That means a situation where everything in all of the universe, ?every person in the world, and all the material things of the world, the whole, all of creation ? are living under the dynamic rule of God's love. That's the reign of God. Or the love of God enters into the life of every person, every creature, all of creation, and all of us are guided by that love of God. We surface that love of God in our own hearts.</p> <p>But now to do that, well, it's important to reflect on what we mean by the love of God. There's a beautiful passage in the first letter of John, where John says, ?My dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God, for God is love. And this is love,? John goes on to say, ?not that we love God, but that God first loved us.?</p>	<p>Eight Subj in Ordinary Time Full text of the readings</p> <p>Psalms 62:2-3, 6-7, 8-9 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 Matthew 6:24-34</p>
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God first loved us: This is what is so important for us to understand and experience, and to know deeply in our whole being. God first loved me. I don't earn God's love; no matter what I do, God loves me. He loves me first and loves me always, and isn't that first lesson today a beautiful expression of what God's love is? God seen as a mother; Isaiah finding courage to people in exile: ?Sing, O Heavens; rejoice, O earth; break forth into song, O mountains, for God has comforted God's people and taken pity on those who are afflicted.?

But then the people say, ?But God has forsaken me. My God has forgotten me.? ?Can a woman forget the baby at her breast, and have no compassion on the child of her womb? Yet, even though she forgets, I will never forget you.? That's God's love ? like the love of a mother for the child from her womb, a love that's unlimited, a love that cannot be broken. A mother's love is like that and Isaiah is teaching us that is God's love. God is like a mother who will never stop loving her child, each one of us.

So that's the love of God that we must surface within our spirits and our hearts ? be aware of how God has first loved me and what that love means. That's the first thing about seeking the kingdom of God, or the reign of God, first. But then there's another part that goes with this seeking the reign of God, and it's addressed not to each of us as individuals, but to the whole community of God's people.

?Seek the reign of God, where love rules all ? the dynamic power of God's love,? and if we think of the reign of God in that way, well then God's love through us, who are disciples of Jesus, have been called to experience this love. Through us, we will help to transform our world into the situation where God's love permeates everything.

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This is described beautifully in another passage in the book of the prophet Isaiah that you'll hear Wednesday, if you come to Mass on Ash Wednesday: ?Is that the kind of fast the preachers mean? Is fasting merely bowing down one's head, making use of sackcloth and ashes? Would you call that fasting? No,? the prophet says, ?see this is the fast that pleases me.

?Breaking the fetters of injustice; unfastening the thongs of the yolk; setting the oppressed free; breaking every yolk of injustice. And so fast by sharing your bread with the hungry; bring to your house the homeless; clothe the one you see naked. Then will your light break forth like the sun.?

See, if we make the reign of God ... if we seek that first of all and strive to make the reign of God happen in our world, that's what we will be doing. So people then might find it very difficult to trust in today's Gospel where Jesus says, ?Don't worry; trust in God.? They will have confidence because God's people are changing and transforming our world into the reign of God where God's love prevails. Then there is hope.

A person who is being paid less than a minimum wage: I'd hope that all of us would work in order to bring about that change that is being called for to raise the minimum wage so that anyone who works full time at least is out of poverty. Shelter the homeless: What about the immigrants in our nation that we tend to push away? ?You welcome them,? Isaiah is saying.

That's the reign of God. Begin to live more simply and share your food with the hungry. Some people sometimes give up a meal a week, and then the money they would have spent for that give to a soup kitchen or food pantry. See, there are lots of ways in which we can seek to make the reign of God happen.

As all of us ? the community of God's people ? hear this call of Jesus: ?Seek the reign of God first of all, then all these other things will begin to happen,? and everyone can look forward to a full human life where the goods of the earth are shared by all, not by a few.

As we look forward to our celebration of the season of Lent, I think it's important for us to hear deeply today's Scripture lessons and be determined how, in our own lives, we will seek first the kingdom of God, and God's justice so that all of these other things may be given to us and to all of God's sons and daughters.

[Homily given at St. Hilary Parish, Redord, Mich?. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. Sign up here to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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