

There are many ways for us to think about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. One way is to see it as an outward, literal kingdom in which justice, peace, equality and harmony are established in the world under the rule of Christ. Some religious groups, who actually may have very little in common with mainstream Christianity, do believe exactly this: they look forward to the establishing of God's Kingdom on this earth under the rule of Christ and the sweeping away of all sin and wickedness. Many other Christians of different denominations share this belief – and it can be a very seductive one. After all, every day we pray: “Thy kingdom come.”

This was the basis of Liberation Theology in the '70s and '80s, particularly in South America and especially among the Jesuit missionaries, who fostered the image of 'Christ the Liberator'. It was, obviously, a very popular image among those who were persecuted and oppressed by the state or who passed their lives in dire poverty. Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador,

gave his life for the cause of the liberation of the people. The mandate for action was taken from the words of Jesus himself, who said: 'Whenever you did it to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.' Or, of course, failed to do it. That we have a mandate for love and loving our brothers and sisters in a very practical way, there can be no doubt; love always finds its perfection in practice, not theory. In the Letter of St James, it says:

“If one of you says to a poor person, ‘Go in peace; keep yourself warm and eat well,’ but does nothing to help them with their physical needs, what good is that?”

However, I do not believe it will ever be possible to establish God's kingdom of peace, truth, justice and love on this earth, in this life; for the Hassidic mystics called this world 'the kingdom of lies.' On the other hand, we should always try to live our lives according to the light and truth of God's kingdom; because those same Hassidic mystics also said: 'You are not expected to

succeed in the task... but neither are you allowed to abandon it'.

In today's gospel reading Jesus uses the metaphor of a field sowed with wheat – he often used it – and he actually gives his disciples an explanation of the metaphor's meaning. He tells them that the sower of the good seed, the wheat, is the Son of Man – himself, that is – and the field is the world; the sower of the bad seed – the weeds – is the devil. The good seed are the children of God and the bad seed are the children of the evil one. They grow together, but at the end of time the angels will harvest the field and all the weeds will be rooted up and burned. It's very tempting to take this literally: in this world, the wicked flourish alongside the good and sometimes the good don't really flourish very much at all. But – at the end of time the wicked will all be plucked up and burned. All very satisfactory, very pleasing, very neat – provided that we're numbered among the good seed, of course. The problem is, who gets to decide which is the good seed and which is the

bad? We could draw up lists of everybody we know or have ever encountered or heard about – the good seed on the right, the bad seed on the left. However, it is absolutely certain that the list God gives to his angel reapers won't tally with ours at all – which will surely come as a bitter disappointment. Only God can see into the human heart.

But we must remember that Jesus always gave the most obvious explanation first – which was usually fairly superficial but satisfied most of his hearers – in order to get his disciples to think more deeply about it for themselves.

We can think more deeply about it by internalizing it – by understanding the metaphor as an image of what is happening inside ourselves. We have, each one of us, one foot on the earth and another in heaven; we are amphibians, breathing the sweet air of paradise and inhaling the thick smog of this world; we are half animal and half angel; our soul has one face turned down to

look at the earth and the other turned up, to gaze at God.

In others words, the good seed and the bad seed *are growing within ourselves*, in our own psyche; our own soul is the field that is full of wheat and weeds. St Paul echoes this when he writes in his Letter to the Romans:

“I do not do the good that I wish to do; instead, I continually do the evil that I do not wish to do.”

St Paul felt helpless and wretched about this and begged to be set free; but frankly I think he was being rather neurotic about it – after all, it probably applies to most of us. We all want to do good and sometimes end up doing quite the opposite – but this is precisely because the good seed and the bad seed, the wheat and the weeds, are growing together in the field of our soul. Our consolation is this: when the end of our particular allotted span comes, God will pluck the weeds out – all our faults and failings, our bad habits, our cruelties and our lack of loving kindness, all our grudges and jealousies, gossiping and dishonesty – God himself will

pluck them out of our soul with a gentle hand and, our spiritual soil weeded, he will gather us to himself and store us in the barns of his Infinite Heart.

In the words of the beautiful Irish poem:

*Ag Críost an síol, ag Críost an fómhar;
i n-iothlainn Dé go dtugtar sinn.*

*(Christ's is the seed, Christ's is the crop,
in the barns of God may we be brought home.)*