

“The Kingdom of God is close at hand.”

Today, in the Gospel, Jesus speaks to us about The Kingdom of God. And He says these words: “The Kingdom of God is close at hand.” What does ‘*The Kingdom of God*’ really mean? We can explain it as God’s presence and God’s friendship. When He tells us that “The Kingdom of God is close at hand,” Jesus is telling us that God, Himself, is nearby. He is there for us. He is available. He offers us His friendship. He is close to us and wants us to remain close to Him. This is the Good News that Jesus has come to tell us about. In Him, God, Himself, is near to us. God lives among us; He has become one of us. Is this not truly good? When He came to live on earth as a human being like us, God chose His own name and wanted to be called ‘Immanuel’ which means: “God-with-us.” God is with us. God is for us. God is near to us. God is for us. God is near to us.

In our world, many people feel lonely. There are some older people who are left very much on their own. There are sick people whom nobody comes to visit in the hospital. There are women who have been abandoned by their husbands. And there are young people, too, who feel lonely. They sometimes feel nobody understands them. Yes, there is much loneliness in people, and yet ‘God-with-us’ is there, so nearby. We are not alone. He is there close at hand. How can we reach Him? How can we receive the friendship He offers us? Jesus tells us how to welcome Him into our lives... We have heard Him say: “*The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News!*”

“*Repent and believe.*” This is what is expected from us. This is the way to welcome God into our lives. This is the way to open ourselves to the friendship He wants between Himself and us. To REPENT is to turn away from our crooked and evil ways. To repent is really *re-turning* to God. We had been following our own path. We had been doing things our way. Now we turn back and follow God’s way. We walk with Him. The kind of BELIEVING that Jesus asks from us is not only to agree that something is true. It is to place our trust in someone. It is to rely on that person. More, still, it is to build our lives on the words of the Someone—Jesus, Himself.

In the First Reading, the people of Nineveh did exactly what Jesus is speaking about. We have heard: “The people of Nineveh believed in God. God saw their efforts to change their evil behavior.” We may think changing our ways is not easy. All of us find it difficult to change. To change anything, we usually do not like it. We are used to certain ways; we find it easier to use that way. It takes time to change. You will need to repeat and repeat the new way to erase the old way. To change some evil way of doing is even more difficult. To stop lying and to speak the truth. To stop cheating and be honest to people. To stop fighting and live in peace with my neighbors, all this is far from easy. But remember, God is there with you, to help you to change. You just need to cooperate with His graces. In the Responsorial Psalm, we have heard the words of the Psalmist: “He shows the path to those who stray.” All we need to do is to believe in Him, in His love and compassion.