

Father Richard P. McBrien

# Essays in Theology



## The Kingdom of God

As our summer session at Notre Dame began its final week, I had the privilege of presiding and preaching at the final Sunday liturgy on July 26.

In all of my 21 years as a columnist, I have never used one of my homilies as "filler" for this space. I'm going to make an exception this week for two reasons: 1) few of my readers have any idea how — or even whether — I make the transition from the column to the pulpit; and, more decisively, 2) this particular homily is short enough to fit here.

If you think this a bad idea, let me know and I'll promise never to do it again.

Jesus began his public ministry following the arrest of John the Baptist. Mark's Gospel reports that Jesus "appeared in Galilee proclaiming the good news of God." And then Mark tells us what Jesus' preaching was all about: "This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand! Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel!"

The Second Vatican Council declares that the Church has the same missionary focus. The Church has "a single intention: that God's kingdom may come" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 45). Indeed, when the Lord himself taught us to pray, he directed us to pray for the coming of the kingdom: "Thy kingdom come!"

Today's readings (First Kings 3:5, 7-12; Romans 8:28-30; Matthew 13:44-52), like Jesus' preaching and the Church's mission, are focused on the kingdom or reign of God. To see the kingdom, to serve it and then to enter it — these are the decisive moments or stages of a godly existence.

Solomon could have asked God for a long life, for riches or for the punishment of his enemies. Or he could have requested what some modern politicians might have asked for: a telegenic personality, or perhaps the gift of deniability and a conveniently faulty memory. But he asked only for "an understanding heart to judge (God's) people and to distinguish right from wrong."

Solomon wished only to see the kingdom, i.e., to see into the mind and heart and will of God, so that his own mind and heart and will might be attuned to God's. He wanted only to judge God's people as God would judge them. For that, Solomon needed to see the people as God sees them, and to discern right from wrong as God discerns right from wrong.

The second reading, from the letter of Paul to the Romans, is also about kingdom or reign of God, which is the working out of God's plan for our salvation. The king-

dom is the will of God realized in history and then beyond history.

"We know," St. Paul writes, "that God makes all things work together for the good of those who have been called according to his decree." We are called and justified, Paul says, and then glorified. We see the kingdom, we serve it and then we are called into it, unto eternal glory.

So precious, so full of beauty is this kingdom of God that nothing else can have priority over it. The only reality worthy of absolute and total commitment is the kingdom of God.

We are to be like the man in the Gospel who, when he found the buried treasure, sold all that he owned so that he could buy the field. We are to be like the merchant who, after a long search, found "one really valuable pearl," and then went home and put everything he owned up for sale so that he could purchase this pearl of great price. Nothing else mattered.

And we are to be like the seamen who dragged the lake, collecting all sorts of things, and then separated the good from the bad. What is useless, i.e., what contributes nothing to our quest for the kingdom, is to be set aside or thrown away.

We must allow nothing to obscure our vision of the kingdom. We must allow nothing to deter our service of the kingdom. And we must allow nothing to block our entrance into the kingdom.

"Have you understood all this?" Jesus asked his listeners. They said they did. Do we? We had better, because there's nothing more important to understand. The kingdom of God is the beginning, the middle and the end of the Christian life, and the mission of the Church.

We are called to be signs and instruments of this kingdom, a kingdom, we are reminded by the Second Vatican Council, that is a kingdom of "justice, love and peace" as well as of "truth and life, of holiness and grace" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 39).

To see the kingdom is to see God at work in the poor, the oppressed, the socially marginalized. To serve the kingdom is to serve the God, who is present in the hungry, the imprisoned, the homeless. "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

And to enter the kingdom is to become finally what God has always intended us to become.

It's time to sell off what we don't need in our lives, and to invest our energies totally in the one thing that really matters, indeed that *only* matters.

Grant us all, O Lord, "wise and understanding" hearts.

Father Paul J. Cuddy

# On the Right Side



## Father Kiggins' anxiety

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following column responds to a letter to the editor written by Father Roy J. Kiggins, pastor of the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Brockport. The letter appears in its entirety on page 12.

It seems to me that St. Bernard's Institute (SBI) should award me an honorary degree of some kind. It is common for academic institutions to so honor people who are instrumental in bringing great shekels for them. This outpouring of indignation against me from staff, graduates and other friends of SBI at my recent column "Where There's a Will..." is puzzling to me, since the article is clear enough.

The topic under discussion was the response to a question from an old friend, Miss Ann Tressy of Ithaca, sister of my classmate Father John Tressy, who died 17 years ago after long service in Rochester and Wolcott, and a short stay in Macedon. The subject was the holy order of priesthood. Miss Tressy had told me that, as a memorial to her priest brother, she had placed in her will a bequest to St. Bernard's Seminary for the training of men for the priesthood. Now that the seminary is no more, what should she do?

It seems to me that my reply to a woman who had holy orders specifically in mind was clear: that St. Bernard's Institute is a kind of successor to St. Bernard's Seminary, but is not a seminary. This was a simple statement of fact with no perjorative undertones. Perhaps a syllogism may be helpful:

**Major:** In memory of her priest brother, Miss Tressy wishes to make a bequest to a seminary that prepares men for the sacrament of holy orders.

**Minor:** St. Bernard's Institute is not such an institution.

**Ergo:** SBI is not a subject for her bequest.

Don't you think I had an obligation to give her an honest answer to her question? I did suggest two options: 1) to make a bequest to the bishop of Rochester, specifically for the training of seminarians — the diocese sends men to Catholic University, Rome, Louvain and Immaculate Conception in Darlington, N.J., though none to Dunwoodie in the Archdiocese of New York; and 2) to make a bequest to the Propagation of the Faith or to our own St. John Fisher alumnus Bishop Raphael Ndigni in Kenya, Africa, again specifically for men to be trained for the priesthood. I made this second suggestion citing the overflow of vocations in the Third World and the lack of funds for their education.

Now come these excited reactions that I did the dirty to SBI. How? By simply saying that SBI is not a seminary? This proceeds entirely from the work of SBI, and why one should consider that a perjorative statement is a mystery to me.

Now, it does seem to me that all this indignation from loyal alumni and alumnae will impel them to put their money where their mouths have been. Your own final paragraph is admirable. viz.: "Lest I be inconsistent, my next task is to update my will so that the institute replaces the seminary as recipient of at least part of what I can't take with me." If these indignant folk will follow your example, the financial problems of SBI should be resolved by bringing the vocal loyalty of my decriers to the practical loyalty of the cash box.

Since you are so young, I suppose SBI cannot count on your gift very soon. But it seems to me that these young people who are so enthusiastic about the institute should send generous donations, according to their means. I realize that many of the alumnae are sisters in vowed poverty and many of the students are generous souls who have taken courses at a great sacrifice. But there are others who can be generous and who can shell out now.

I suspect the generality of the diocese knows very little about SBI. Now that there is this great indignation from those who have a vested interest in the institution — "vested" in the sense that staff, students, alumni and alumnae are personally involved, even as parents have a "vested" interest in their children — many in the diocese will become more aware of SBI. This is a superb public-relations opportunity for it.

Many years ago, I decided that I would give to charity at least the equal of anything I should spend on my own pleasure, including vacations, entertainment, special restaurant meals, etc. This is not so noble as it might seem, since I have no wife or family to support. I have done this faithfully, donating substantial sums mostly to mission work in the Third World countries.

For example, last year Bishop Ndigni wrote, thanking me for \$500, saying he had used much of it for a refrigerator for his native Sisters of St. Francis who had no way of preserving meat or other perishable things donated to them. Do you think that check less worthy than a check for SBI?

If my critics will do as much for SBI, the institute will be in the ball park financially. And if, as a consequence, I am awarded an honorary degree, I will invite you to put the hood over my shoulders.

## Shaker festival at Mumford museum offers rare look at lifestyle of 19th century religious sect

The one building in the Shaker Colony at Groveland, New York, that brought together the "Believers" and "The World" will again welcome "The World" when it opens to the public at Genesee Country Village and Museum on Sunday, August 30.

Public programming during the opening of the Shakers Trustees' Building will include performances of a suite of songs and dances depicting a Shaker religious service of the 1850s. The dancers will be costumed in traditional Shaker dress and will present several well-documented songs and dances. The dance suite, which is performed by the Da Igramo Folk Ensemble, will be presented in the museum's village square bandstand at 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.

An illustrated presentation on Shaker design will be offered by June Sprigg, curator of collections at Hancock Shaker Village, Pittsfield, Mass., at 1:15 p.m. and 4:15 p.m. Sprigg is the author of four books depicting Shaker life, work and art. She was also the guest curator at a 1986 Shaker exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.

Robert Becker of the Cornell Experiment Station in Geneva will also be on hand to lead tours and answer questions about the Shaker vegetable gardens, which he has reproduced at the rear of the Shakers Trustees' Building. Vegetable seed packets prepared by the Shaker sisters at Groveland were widely distributed and were to be found on the counters of



SHAKERS near LEBANON state of NEW YORK their mode of worship.

town and country stores throughout the eastern and midwestern states. The sale of seeds was a significant source of income for many Shaker communities.

The Shakers Trustees' Building, was built in

1838 and moved to the museum site in 1984. The Shakers, a communal, celibate sect used the building as an office for the east colony at Groveland, as living quarters for the trustees and as an infirmary. Positioned near the en-

trance to the settlement, the Trustees' Building was where, for more than a half century, the Shakers transacted their business with "The World."

The building was slated for demolition as the New York State Groveland Correctional Facility absorbed more and more of the property once colonized by the Shakers. Genesee County Museum acquired the building because of its historical significance and moved it 30 miles north to the museum site.

The Shakers were the first in this country to produce herbs on a scale large enough to supply the pharmaceutical market. The site development of the Shakers Trustees' Building includes large gardens given over to more than 40 varieties of herbal materials used for medicinal purposes.

Participation in Shaker Festival events is included in the regular museum admission fee of \$7.50 for adults and \$3.50 for children six through 14. Children under six and museum members are admitted free.

### St. Andrew's plans reunion

Organizers of a reunion of the Class of 1942 at St. Andrew's School are presently looking for missing classmates. The group is planning an upcoming reunion, but needs more information on all graduates.

Contact Joe Gefell at (716)663-2154 or Joan Mattle Dimmick at 663-2548 if you have any information that would be helpful to them.