

**REPENT CAUSE THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND - Biblical Commentary
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Mt 3.1-12

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

In the verses of this Sunday's reading there are three important things to examine because, if they are not well understood there is the risk that the life of the believers will be effected differently from what the evangelist wanted.

The first is the announcement of John the Baptist in the desert and it is imperative, *"Repent!"* This means the change of mentality that leads to a change in behavior. Unfortunately in the past, this statement of John the Baptist had been translated, with "if you do not do penance ",

gave the idea of a Christianity made of penance, sacrifices and mortifications; all words, all images that are absent in the language of Jesus

Jesus in the Gospels had never asked to make penance. Jesus never in the Gospels asked people to mortify themselves nor to make sacrifices, but rather the contrary ! Taking the expression from Hosea *"Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'"* (Matt. 9,13) Jesus does not ask for sacrifice towards God, but mercy towards mankind.

So John the Baptist's invitation, is "change behavior", which results in a different orientation of one's own existence, not to think of oneself, but think of others. This conversion enables to be nearer to the Kingdom of Heaven. Also here in the past there was a bit of confusion; the Kingdom of Heaven was interpreted as the kingdom in heaven.

But it is not like this. The Kingdom of Heaven is used by Matthew and means the Kingdom of God. But why does Matthew use this expression the "Kingdom of Heaven"? Because he writes for a community of Jews and is careful not to hurt their sensibility because they cannot pronounce or write the word 'God', but use in his place substitutes.

Exactly like us when we say "thanks to heaven", where one intends to thank God, the divinity. So the Kingdom of Heaven it not the kingdom in heaven, it's not in the hereafter, but it is God's project for humanity. He is the king that governs his people, he is the father that takes care of his children.

This is the Kingdom of Heaven, therefore the Kingdom of God. Why is it said that this Kingdom of God is near and not already here? Because this Kingdom of Heaven does not come from above by divine intervention, but is conditioned by the collaboration of mankind through the acceptance of Jesus' beatitudes. Jesus actually in the first beatitude proclaims blessed are the poor in spirit, those that freely and willingly decide to be poor because it IS this.....

It is not a promise for the future(will be), but it IS the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the exact moment in which there are individuals that decide to orientate their lives to do good and for the wellbeing of others, in this same moment God's reply is that he, like a father, will take care of them and their needs.

So, we have seen the word "conversion". A change of mentality, the Kingdom of God, the realization of God's project for humanity, and at last John proclaims that he baptizes with water, meaning helping with the change of life style, but the strength to begin this new life, he cannot give. Jesus, qualified as *He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit*, will give it. This is so important that in all the four Gospels we find the same expression of Jesus' mission.

Jesus is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. If baptizing in water means to immerge a body in a liquid external to man as a sign of a changed of life style, baptizing with the Holy Spirit means, to immerge, to drench and soak a person with the Spirit, being the same strength and the same life as God.

But when and how Jesus baptizes in the Holy Spirit? the answer is in the Gospels, in the moment of the supper with His disciples, the moment of the Eucharist. The supper is, in fact, where the disciples soak themselves to be faithful to Jesus – to eat the bread is an undertaking to make oneself bread, food for the lives of others, also at the cost of coming to His same end, this means to drink from the chalice –the Holy Spirit is poured into His disciples and believers in every age and it makes them like Jesus, “Sons Of God”

Jesus’ supper therefore is the moment in which He answers to those that have followed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Actually drinking from the chalice, expression of commitment that puts no limit on love, the disciples receive the Spirit, the same strength of the Father’s love.

The penetration of this wine-blood into the intimate of mankind is the communication of the Spirit, life and strength of love that transforms mankind.