

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

10 Pentecost
July 20, 2008
Fr. Bill McGinty

“The Kingdom”

Today we gather at the 10 o'clock service to welcome John Patrick Llewellyn to the church of the Good Shepherd. He does not come alone, but flanked by his loving family. He is their gift, the most valuable possession to each one of them, Mom, Dad, Grandparents, Aunts and Uncles, nieces and nephews and God parents. Each one of them would give their life for him today, if asked. We are gathered to cement that relationship through Baptism and to tell all who care to know that this is a sacred relationship and that John Patrick has a holy covenant with God. That lies on the rest of us, the kind burden of being a family he can be proud of, and being an example that he can follow.

Walk out into the high street, stop any ten people and ask them: “What is Baptism?” They will all tell you: “Oh that’s where they pour water on the baby’s head.”

But Baptism is much more than pouring water on the baby. Baptism is like the coronation of a King. We anoint John Patrick on the head with oil, just as the prophet Samuel anointed the young David King in the Book of Samuel. John Patrick as King is not just the way his Mom and Dad feel about him, it is the way God feels about him. Baptism is our acknowledgement that this child is created by God and called by God into Christian fellowship.

We all deserve to be treated as a King or Queen for a day. Sad to say, that never happens for many people during the course of their entire lifetime. For a lifetime no one ever treats them like a King. And yet, that is the reason why this church is here. For the reason for this church or any church, is mission. That mission is to lead people back to being part of the Kingdom of God. Belonging to a Kingdom is special to so many people. Whether it is Sweden, Denmark or the UK we admire their sense of timeless tradition, We love to catch the pageantry and ceremonial. We like to know what the uniform stands for, and what the flags mean.

Do you know that the Queen of England goes to Royal Winsor Castle each year and hands out gold coins to a long line of senior citizens? The exact number corresponds to her age and the sum of gold genuine they receive, is the same as the number of years she has been on the throne.

It’s called ‘Maundy’ money and it has been a tradition for almost 1,000years.

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In Ireland, we don't have Kingdoms, because we killed all our kings' years ago and when they were all gone, we went overseas and tried to kill as many other people's kings as we could possibly find.

However, we do have one county in Ireland that simply calls itself the "Kingdom." It's in the extreme south west and its real name is County Kerry. Kerry people think of themselves as pretty special. In fact if you do not belong to Kerry or "The Kingdom" as they call it, they have no regard for you at all. But Kerry people treat each other with great kindness, generosity and hospitality. They take great pride in their county, its lakes, mountains and natural beauty. Its shoreline and coast are legendary and it is the home of the Irish language and Gaelic culture, music, dance and much more.

Such a richly beautiful place is loved by its inhabitants and that is why they call it "The Kingdom" But throughout the rest of Ireland, Kerry, the Kingdom has breed hatred and animosity. Perhaps, it is jealousy or envy, but many other people in other counties despise and dislike any mention of the Kingdom. They would prefer for any county to win in Gaelic football except Kerry. That is an event that rarely happens. Such is the opposition that Kerry and Kerryman jokes abound in the same way as Polish or Ukrainian jokes can be found in Chicago.

If I tell you "What happens when a Kerry man leaves Ireland? The answer is the National IQ goes up by 2% you will know what I mean.

Despite all this you will never convince a Kerryman that there is a better place in the entire world than his sweet Kingdom.

50% of all of Jesus' teaching is also talking about a Kingdom. For centuries Christians have tried to build and emulate the Kingdom of Jesus' teaching. It has become, for many people, an ideal, a Shangri-la, a place of love and peace, a future vision.

When we spoke of Christ's Kingdom in this way. We call it the Eschatological Kingdom of Heaven. What we mean by that is that it is not here just yet, but one day it will be realized. It is the Kingdom that Jesus teaches about in today's Gospel, about the wheat and the taxes. He teaches that one day justice will be served and God will punish the wicked and reward the good. Many Christians belong to this biblical tradition. They are content to wait for the Eschatological Kingdom when a just God will make everything right.

As I said, many Christians belong to this tradition, I just don't happen to be one of them.

In HBO's wonderful mini series "John Adams" the Senator from Massachusetts has been sitting in the 1st Continental Congress listening to Dickerson and his colleague from South Carolina stand and speak about petitioning and appeasing the King of England. At last

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frustrated and angry, Adams stands and with clenched fist proclaims: “Give me a free country, while I live and breath, give me a country of justice and freedom.”

Today Adam’s words are echoed in the way many of us Christians feel about the Kingdom of God. We cannot wait for an eternal Kingdom of peace and love; we cannot wait while our sisters and brothers grow hungry and where justice does not reign for the persecuted, the oppressed, throughout the world where poverty reigns while despots and cruel regimes rule.

Ask me again what I think Jesus means by “The Kingdom of God” and I will tell you show me your church’s mission. Because if the mission of your church comes anyway close to the mission of Jesus, then the poor, the sick, the unforgiven, the homeless, the hungry and the orphan are genuine concerns of yours.

We all have to be very careful when we decide that we wish to belong to Jesus’ Kingdom, because Jesus’ Kingdom is an invitation to get down and dirty in working for those who cannot fight for themselves, cannot receive their share, and cannot voice their helplessness. Show me a church that has that in their budget and annual report and I’ll show you a church that is already realizing the Kingdom of God.

“What can I do?” you ask. Well, we can all do something and from where I stand so many of you have dirty hands and dirty faces because you have fed the poor, baked for Safe Haven, struggled with fund raisers for the food pantry.

You might be knee deep in garbage every flea market and chili covered on behalf of poor families in the Child Care Center, but like those distant Kerryman you can take pride in belonging to Christ’s tattered and torn Kingdom.

Tomorrow, Elizabeth leaves for Cameroon. What she will find there will speak to her of a Kingdom of love and joy amid overwhelming poverty, but it is not a poverty of spirit. And as we bid her a safe journey, we send our prayers and best wishes to our brothers and sisters who share our Gospel story.

So John Patrick, this is your inheritance, to belong to a Kingdom of love where compassion and forgiveness are weekly celebrated around this Altar table of joy. Welcome.

Amen+

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