

August 2001

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Recommended Citation

Riga, Peter J. (2001) "If the Kingdom has Come, How Come Nothing has Changed?," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 68 : No. 3 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lmq/vol68/iss3/4>

If the Kingdom has Come, How Come Nothing has Changed?

by

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*If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say this to the mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you.
(Luke 17:5)*

Like us, the first Christians were astonished to hear Jesus say that the Kingdom had already arrived, it was already here. They, like us, were shocked to see things go on just as before with no change: same pain, same agonies, same violence, same injustices, same murders, same savagery, same cruelty – nothing really has changed. How then can it be that the Kingdom has come? How can it be that the Messiah has already come? Since nothing has changed. All will change when Messiah comes. This is particularly poignant since the early Christians were in the midst of persecution. Their prayer, like ours, was to ask God to deliver them from evil and yet the heavens were silent.

Neither Jesus nor the first disciples were naïve enough to believe in the face of all contrary evidence that God would intervene to establish justice, punish the wicked and save the just. What God gives us in response to their prayer and ours is His Spirit, Who is love and Who gives us the power to live love in all the conditions of our life where we are placed. Loving makes us like God, similar to God. Thus all circumstances, even the most painful and despairing, become for us the instruments of a greater existence because to exist, to be created, is to be made in the image and likeness of God, Who by His very nature is love.

For behold, the Kingdom of God is in your midst (Luke 17:21). When will God respond to our cries? Time passes and our misfortunes are still here. We picture for ourselves an image of God who puts us to the test by making us wait and be patient or even an image of God from whom we must wrest things by the force of our insistence like the judge in *Luke 18:2-8*.

This may be true of earthly judges and other powerful people whom we must beg for relief. This may be true for earthly people, Jesus says, but not for God. The judge in the parable accedes to the woman not for love of justice but because he wants peace. This is not true of God. He is justice itself and every injustice wounds Him as well as ourselves. This becomes clear later on, on the cross. Jesus affirms that in spite of all contrary appearances, God does not wait for our calls and prayers. Other texts tell us that God precedes our prayers and that it is useless to so insist; *In your prayer do not be like the pagans who think that in multiplying prayers they will be heard by God ... Your Father already knows of what you have need before you ask Him. (Matthew 6: 7-8).*

What merits our attention is this: "Of what you have need." Neither can we forget the texts that tell us that we must pray without ceasing. Thus we see Moses praying with his arms extended, the great symbol of prayer, without being able to interrupt his prayer because when he lets down his arms, Israel's enemies begin to triumph. That means that the response of God is given during the prayer itself and perhaps that the prayer itself is God's response. We must pray without ceasing.

We also learn that we can never say or pray that "O.K., it's finished" because we can never move away from God without bringing about our own spiritual death. If we become disconnected from God, we die. It's as simple as that. The shore cannot separate itself from its source (the sea) without ceasing to be shore, without disappearing in what it is. God has already answered: *All that you ask for in your prayers, believe that you have received them and they shall be granted to you (Mark 11:24).* Difficult passage? Only if we do not have faith. What is that for which we ask? *You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives so that you may spend it on your pleasures (James 4:3).* What do we or should we ask for?

We ask for only one thing because the Kingdom has already arrived: the gift of the Spirit of God who is love. We pray for this Spirit to inhabit us that in all that we do, in all the circumstances of our lives, no matter how painful and terrible, that we be given the power to love so that we may thereby become more and more the images and the likenesses of God who is love. We become love more and more. This is the unique object of our prayer.

When King Beauvain of the Belgians conquered Jerusalem in 1099, he argued with the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem that Messiah had come in Jesus. The rabbi went to the window, looked at all the armed crusaders in the street below and said, "But nothing has changed." When Messiah comes, everything would change. But has anything really changed?

But everything has changed. There is something new on earth. The crucified and resurrected Lord has released His spirit on all those who will accept Him and the spirit is changing the face of the earth. Not all at once, but slowly, surely, through the ones who love Him. "God has created us without us. He will not save us without us." (St. Augustine) God has created us without us. He will not renew the face of the earth without us. God respects our freedom too much to do otherwise.

In each one who receives that Spirit of love, that person becomes more the image and likeness of God who is love and to that degree is changed and becomes the instrument of change of love in whatever he or she does and touches. The Kingdom is here; we have only to say "yes" to welcome it into our hearts so that the Spirit of love may change us and in so changing we may in the Spirit change the face of the earth.

Otherwise it will not be done. Not now. Not ever.
