

Some Reflections on the Reign of God from Jesus' Point of View

(How did Jesus' actions and words manifest the Reign of God?)

"As we seek to become attuned to Jesus, we need to ask first of all: What is the most important thing for him, the center of his life, the cause he always pursued, his absolute priority? There can be only one answer: Jesus lives for the reign of God. That is his true passion. It is the cause for which he struggles and pours out his life, for which he is persecuted and finally executed. For Jesus, ' . . . only the kingdom is absolute and it makes everything else relative.'"¹

Jesus moves from affirmation and discernment in the desert about his mission in the rushing-in of God's reign to active and compassionate engagement in people's lives. Here are a few examples:

- He worships and preaches in the synagogue in Nazareth. He mirrors the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18 ff)
He worships in the Capernaum synagogue, heals a paralyzed man, and heals Peter's mother-in-law. (Mark 1:21'-49)
- The next day, after he had been praying in a deserted place early in the morning, crowds found him and wanted to keep him from leaving Capernaum, but Jesus said "I must go to the other towns and declare the good news of the reign of God, for I was sent for this purpose." He then preached in synagogues throughout Judea. (Luke 4:42-44)
- Travelling near the village of Nain, Jesus restores the son of a widow to life and in doing so restores the widow's place in her family and community. (Luke 7:11-17)
- Jesus casts out demons in a variety of places and situations.
- He heals lepers and a woman with an issue of blood (Luke 5:12-16) and (Luke 8:42b-48)
- He heals a centurion's servant.

Jesus' baptism, his understanding of the meaning of John the Baptizer's ministry, his discernment in the wilderness following his baptism, and the palpable presence of God's energy in his life (witnessed in healing, exorcism, raising the dead, restoring dignity and usefulness in people's lives, and feeding the hungry confirmed in Jesus' mind that the reign of God (longed for by Hebrew prophets and kings) were a present reality.

Jesus called others to join him in manifesting what God was already doing. He began a movement (not a philosophical school or a new "church") to share in what God was doing in his life. He invited persons to follow him, to be like him. It was a costly invitation. José Pagola describes what this meant then and means today:

- To focus attention and involvement on the lives of the poor
- To live compassionate lives, not by theoretical abstractions, but with concrete nearness to people
- To live with acceptance of all people and be inclusive in behavior
- To accept the way of crucifixion, suffering, and carrying the weight of living for others
- To trust God's presence in following Jesus with hope framed by prayer; to be rooted and grounded in experience of God
- To live a manner of life that makes God's reign tangible

¹ José Antonio Pagola. *Jesus: An historical approximation*. Miami: Convivium Press, 2009, 447. Quotation in the last sentence is from Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 8.