

Every time we pray the “Lord’s Prayer” also known as the “Our Father” we petition God “thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” Advent is the time we once again set our sights on the fulfillment of this petition.

Just what is the “kingdom” we pray for every time we pray the “Lord’s Prayer” and especially so during this Advent Time?

For some the temptation may be to see Advent only as a promise fulfilled a long time ago in the birth of Jesus into human history at Bethlehem. Thus it is a time for “looking back” accompanied by nostalgia and warm sentiments as popularized in our cultural celebrations.

For others the temptation may also be to see the Advent promise fulfilled long ago in the death and resurrection of Jesus and the “job” of the church is to keep the story alive by focusing on Jesus’ return at the end of time in glory when he will separate the righteous from the unrighteous. Some down through history have tried, by various means, to predict with certainty when Christ will come again. We had two such failed predictions this year.

Both Advents are true—the coming of Christ into human history as well as, through faith, the expectation of his coming at the end of the world when he will bring the work of the kingdom he came to establish to its conclusion. Both form part of our faith. However, there is a third sense in which Advent challenges us to understand and live the petition “thy kingdom come.”

The post New Testament Fathers of the Church such as St. Augustine and Origen direct our attention to another advent—the advent of the present moment, the abiding presence of Jesus with and within each of us through the Holy Spirit. In the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Mark from which we will be reading on most of the Sundays of this church year Jesus himself announces this advent: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk. 1:15).

The “kingdom of God” is Jesus himself! The kingdom of God is the invitation to each of us to risk a personal relationship with Jesus with all that such personal relationships offer by way of consolation and comfort, but also challenge and suffering, to be, as Isaiah proclaims today, “clay” in the hands of God as he molds us into the image of Jesus. Like the Israelites in the time of the third Isaiah who speaks to us today, we too are challenged to see the many ways we strive to build our own collective or personal earthly or spiritual kingdoms as “polluted rags”. Jesus wants to come to us now! Jesus wants to build his kingdom in our hearts now! Jesus wants to mold and use us as his body for his continued mission of reconciling and restoring a broken world to his Father’s original intent for our earth and us now! This is what it means to pray “thy kingdom come”.

In today’s gospel passage, Jesus urges us not to miss the “now” of his advent. This prayer I recently read captures the spirit of these Advent days that open again before us.

*Meet us Jesus as we rise and pray our morning offering, as we care for children and parents, as we strap on our sneakers and go the gym, as we give everything we have to our jobs and our families, as we make our examination of conscience before falling asleep. Meet us Jesus as we hear the baby cry and leave our warm beds, as we stand firm against the strong wills of our unformed teenagers, as we look at the same photo album a thousand times with our parents who suffer from Alzheimer’s.*

*Meet us Jesus as we navigate the path back to peace after an argument, insight after a humbling experience, faith after a time of doubt. Meet us Jesus as we process together to receive you in the Eucharist, then to see you at every table throughout the week. Meet us today, Jesus.*

“Thy kingdom come.”