

Coming out of the cornfield onto the ball diamond in the Field of Dreams movie Shoeless Joe Jackson shouts, "Is this Heaven?" To which Ray Kinsella responds, "No... it's Iowa." Iowa is a pretty great place but it's not Heaven. In the "Weeds in the Wheat" parable Jesus presents to us an image of the Kingdom of Heaven. Just what is the Kingdom of Heaven? The Kingdom of Heaven, (same as Kingdom of God) takes up real estate, 14" from our mind, in our heart. The Kingdom of Heaven is *joy and happiness, in this life and in the next. We were created for eternal happiness, and in fact Jesus states in Matthew 18:4, "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

Are we experiencing the Kingdom of Heaven twenty centuries after Jesus walked the earth? If we are not, what went wrong? We may find a clue in Genesis Chapter 3 when Adam and Eve are tempted by the cunning serpent, disobeyed God, and fall from grace. The result: a heart divided. Every man and woman since Adam and Eve, although desiring to do good, has a tendency to sin, referred to as concupiscence. The battle which began in the Garden of Eden now finds a home our divided hearts. That is why Jesus gifts the Church with the Sacrament's of Baptism and Reconciliation, to unload the weight of sin and to restore our hearts. Jesus the ultimate heart doctor came to restore our heart, but He does not knock down the door to our heart. Instead, Jesus stands at the door of our heart and knocks. Every repentant heart is met by Jesus' Mercy. Will we let him in? Give him your anxiety, your trouble, your fears, your sadness, your loneliness. He will transform it into real joy and happiness.

The spiritual life does not come easy. Just like anything in life we have to work at it. We have to spend time in prayer every day and we have to be aware of trip hazards. In last week's Gospel, Jesus tells us in the parable of the soils that there are a number "trip hazards" we have to be aware of: 1) Evil – we have to have defense against the power of darkness. We have to say "no" to many things that led us away from God, 2) Fear in the form of tribulation and persecution, 3) Worldly anxiety and the lure of riches. In this week's Gospel, Jesus teaches us how to deal with the unrighteous. From the College of Bishops in our country---"In its present stage it (the world) is composed of the good and the bad. The judgment of God alone will eliminate the sinful. Until then there must be patience and the preaching of repentance." Just as Jesus did, we persevere in prayer, call others into relationship with God, and go about doing good works. We lead by example

and teach others about God's Way to bring about the "Kingdom of Heaven" to give thanks to God for His many blessings to us. We don't condemn, and the example we give as Christians must be built on the solid relationship we first have with God. A prayful person I know once told me that through prayer we begin to realize that God is always at work in others and when we do we will see them differently. We will look upon them the same way God looks upon them.

The Christian family, the domestic church, is under attack in unprecedented ways today. Social media is a gift if used in the correct way. How is the relationship we have with our children? Is the device a substitute of for a meaningful relationship? What are our children's deepest desires? Do we take the time to address their concerns? The domestic church is where we teach our children to have a relationship with God, starting with simple prayers. We teach them to give thanks to God's bountiful blessings.

The Good News is that when we take a small step toward building the Kingdom of Heaven, God blesses and multiplies our efforts. Jesus continues to work through the Church and the Body of Christ. Our life is a gift given to help create a culture of love by our relationships. Our identity lies in the relationship we have with God, in Baptism we become "Children of God" and so we are. Joy flows from the understanding that we are God's children.

We put our trust in Him who made us, and Jesus, the Divine Savior, promises to be with us always until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20), for he sent the Holy Spirit to dwell with us and He feeds us with His heavenly body and blood. In a few moments Jesus will again being broken and poured out for us. In being broken and poured out for us, Jesus desires for us to say yes to His heart. When we say yes to Him our hearts are transformed and we begin to experience the Kingdom of Heaven He so desires for us. Say yes to Jesus. Invite Jesus into your heart.

Dcn. C. J. Bernhard— Sixteen Sunday of Ordinary Time, July 23rd 2017

[Prayerful meditative prayer with Scripture: Hyperlink: Lectio Divina](#)