

What did Jesus mean by telling us “This is the time of fulfillment, the Kingdom of God is at hand?” What is fulfilled? What does He mean by the Kingdom of God?

With these words Jesus is summing up all of human history. The turning point of that history is His own passion, death and resurrection.

We are living in the third and final age of humanity. During the First Age, The Age of Creation, we lived in complete communion with God. When we look back upon this age we use terms like paradise, garden, joy, and fruitfulness. But that age ended with Original Sin. We turned away from God to follow our own way.

By doing so we left the garden and travelled out into the desert, entering the Second Age of Man, the Age of Promise. In the Second Age we were subject to sin and death, enslaved by the devil. But God promised that He would send a savior to free us from the devil's grip. And so we waited, for thousands of years. But during those uncounted thousands of years God was busy at work preparing us for the coming of His Savior. By educating His people, Israel, God prepared the world for the Third Age of Man, the Age of Fulfillment. This began with the arrival of the long awaited Savior and King, Jesus Christ.

The arrival of Christ was the most significant event of our history. God, who exists outside of time and space, enters into His creation in order to save it. He does this through the incarnation, the birth of Jesus. The incarnation sent shockwaves throughout our history, past, present and future. It is extended throughout all of time and space through the life of His Church.

The Third Age, the Time of Fulfillment, is the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Savior. This age will end with the creation of a new Heaven and a new Earth, the full expression of God's Kingdom.

As we enter into the season of Lent, now is the time for us to take stock of where we are, where we came from, and where we are going.

Christ will come again at the end of history. This will end the time when good and evil are allowed to exist together. Jesus will judge the living and the dead, take away the sin of the world, and banish all evil from the new Heaven and new Earth. Injustices will be corrected, and the righteous, those who live in friendship with God, will be fully healed and enjoy the indescribable happiness that comes from seeing God face-to-face.

But the Kingdom of God is also here and now. During Lent let us pray fervently that God will come to rule more fully in our hearts. As members of the Church we are citizens of Christ's eternal Kingdom. If we are good citizens, if we follow the example of Jesus and obey His laws, we will experience true spiritual prosperity.

Saint Paul reminded us that the Kingdom of God is not about eating or drinking. It is about righteousness and peace and joy, brought by the Holy Spirit. Righteousness means a right relationship with God, to walk in His ways, by His side. And that gives us an inner peace that we cannot achieve in any other way. When we walk with God we experience Jesus not as a distant king, but as an intimate friend, a friend who dwells deep within us through the Holy Spirit.

“I will no longer call you servants, for the servant does not know what his Lord is doing. But I have called you friends, because everything whatsoever that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you.”

All of the good we do here on earth, even the smallest act has an eternal value. And Jesus has promised that He will reward all of these acts, not forgetting even the smallest kindness done in His name.

This is why so many Christians have been able to find joy throughout the centuries, even in the face of horrible suffering.

During the Bosnian War back in the 1990's, the MAHLkahtch family lived next to a small lake in the village of JEHzero. One day in 1990 the father of the family

returned from a trip to Austria with a gift for his two teenage sons, a small aquarium with two goldfish.

Two years passed and the Serb forces advanced upon Jezero. The women and the children fled the village but the men stayed behind to fight. The father, Sarnjo MAHLkahtch was killed.

After the fighting Sarnjo's wife snuck back into the village to bury her husband and retrieve whatever she could find of the family's possessions. The goldfish had survived and she let them out into the lake, hoping they would have better luck than the family had.

It was five years before before she and her sons could return to their home. The village, and their home, was in ruins. As she stood there trying to hold back the tears over what they had lost, a flash caught the corner of her eye. It was the lake. There was something odd with the lake and she walked over to take a closer look.

She said, "The whole lake was shimmering from the thousands of goldfish in it. It immediately made me think of my husband. This was something he left me that I never hoped for."

While the war raged on all around it, life under the lake was flourishing. The Malkoc family began to care for, nurture, and sell the goldfish. Since then it has become a thriving, lucrative family business.

The grace of Christ is like that. It takes all of our good deeds, our prayers, our actions, and makes them multiply and spread beneath the surface of life's struggles and battles.

Only when we return home to Heaven, will we see how much good even the smallest act of kindness produced.

As we enter into Lent Jesus reminds us of where we came from, and, more importantly, where we are going, to eternal life with Him. He even tells us how we will get there. “Repent and believe in the Gospel.”

Repent and believe, these words should be our mantra, our watch-words for the season.

First repent, turn away from all self-centered and selfish habits. Give them up as a sacrifice for Lent. In this way you can break bad habits and leave them behind forever.

Jesus invites us to repent of our sins, those ways in which we have turned away from God, and gives us the sacrament of confession to help us and heal us. He gave us this sacrament because He knew that the devil is still hard at work. Though defeated, the devil still preys on our faults and weaknesses, seeking to steal souls away from God, just so he can scream at the almighty, “That's one more you don't have.”

Repentance and confession give God a chance to pour his unconditional mercy into our souls and heal us of the wounds the devil has inflicted upon us.

Second, believe in the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Believing in the Gospel means that we trust enough in Jesus to discern His will in our lives and follow it. It is not enough to pray “thy kingdom come.” If we truly believe, our words will move us to action.

We find God's will in the ten commandments, the beatitudes, the teachings of His Church, and the dictates of our well formed conscience. Greed, lust, laziness, impatience, dishonesty, these are not Gospel values. Leave them behind in the wilderness of Lent. Instead adopt the values of generosity, faithfulness, responsibility, sincerity, and patient kindness. This is God's will for our lives, one that Christ will help us to live out. But we have to give Him the chance to do so.

When we receive the Eucharist we receive the food that will help us and strengthen our hearts to join in Our Lord's victory over temptation, sin and evil. As we begin our journey through Lent, our own forty days in the wilderness, let us thank God for this time of reflection and renewal. Let us thank Him for allowing us to live in the age of fulfillment. And let us ask Him to help us repent, and believe in the Gospel.