



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue  
in the City of New York**

**The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, OBE, DD, *Rector***  
**John Scott, LVO, D. Mus., *Organist and Director of Music***  
**[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)**

**Sunday, January 26, 2003**  
*The Third Sunday after the Epiphany*

*Choral Eucharist  
at 11am*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector  
on  
Saint Mark 1:14-20  
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*ENTERING AND ENJOYING GOD'S KINGDOM*

*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.*

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Today's Gospel reading from the first chapter of Saint Mark is the start of Jesus' public ministry, following the arrest of John the Baptist. Most of our reading concerns Jesus' call of his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, but I want to focus on our Lord's first words of preaching, his announcement of his mission, by looking at it in its three parts.

The first part: "The time is fulfilled." Saint Mark's Greek word here, *kairos*, means time in the sense of a moment of crisis, a turning point, or the proper time in the sense of the fullness of providential time. Violent hands have just been laid on John the Baptist. Jesus regarded John as the last of the prophets; so much so, that Jesus elsewhere refers to John as "Elijah who is to come" in preparation for the Messiah. (Mt 11:14; Mk 9:12-13) That Day dawned in the public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. I will finish this sermon with another way in which the time is fulfilled.

The second part: "The kingdom of God is at hand." Of all the achievements of Christian theology in the twentieth century, perhaps the greatest was the recovery by biblical scholarship of Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup> I believe this recovery was influenced by contrast with the several totalitarian rivals to the Kingdom of God set up by man which truly reached monstrous apocalyptic proportions. In any case, at the heart of our Lord's self-understanding was himself as the herald, and, in his own person and work, the embodiment and the inauguration, of God's rule and reign, God's kingdom. That is why Jesus asserts that *the Kingdom is at hand*.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter and the rest of the apostolic church became "fishers of men" as they realized and proclaimed that Jesus is God the King's Son, indeed, the Prince and the King himself, of that Kingdom. Jesus' distinguishing name for God, after all, was "my Father." God's kingdom is not a worldly principality which must be promoted and maintained by force. It is the Kingdom of our own Creator, who, in response to our fall from his grace, is our Redeemer and who in Christ directly appeals to us to enjoy the grace of that Kingdom. And it is a Kingdom that outlasts all the kingdoms of this world, even those that seem most long-lasting and admirable, or those that seem most aggressive and tyrannical.

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<sup>1</sup> So say John R. Donahue, S.J., and Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., in *Sacra Pagina II, Mark*, p.72.

Furthermore, the Kingdom of God is still under construction by God. In one sense, it was entirely fulfilled in the life, sacrifice, and resurrection of Christ. In another sense, it is still on its way to fulfillment, as the Body of Christ gathers in the children of God from all peoples, nations and languages to complete the Kingdom. In this second sense, we ourselves are workers for the Kingdom – weak and poor as we are – who look forward to the full manifestation of the Kingdom beyond the grave and gate of death.

Now for the third part: “Repent and believe in the Gospel.” In order for us to heed the invitation of Christ to enter the Kingdom of God, from which we are exiles without the knowledge and love of God, we must stop how we have been living. We must, in fact, begin living differently. The New Testament Greek word for repent is *metanoia*, which actually means a change or transformation of mind or consciousness, as in Saint Paul’s phrase, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” (Rom 12:2) Belief, or trust, in the Gospel, which is the Good News of Jesus Christ, cannot come to life without this change of mind away from conformity to this world.

Now let me recommend some things that may seem odd by the world’s conventional standards, but which are in fact signs of health, *metanoia*, the transformation and renewal of the mind for the Kingdom of God.

First: If the bustling and clamor of the world leaves you unsatisfied or even weary, good! It shows you still have an immortal soul that needs proper feeding, rest and exercise. A great Christian poet, William Wordsworth, wrote, “The world is too much with us, late and soon; getting and spending we lay waste our powers; little we see in Nature that is ours.” The realization that you are alienated from the things that count is a sign that you want them. You are yearning for the Kingdom of God.

Second: A good day may not be full of what this world may regard as accomplishments, but it will involve attending to certain matters of the utmost importance in the Kingdom of God. A heartfelt prayer truly offered. A kind word to a needy soul. An apology or a word of forgiveness. Some assistance freely offered, perhaps requiring a going out of your way, to be delivered. Restraint of a selfish, low, or impatient desire. Any, or in some wonderful cases, all of these occurrences means a day has by no means been wasted but redeemed. It has been a good day for you in God’s Kingdom.

Third and lastly: All this can be done not by leaving this world (although it may indeed be your calling, a most worthy one, to become a contemplative monastic), but by being in the world yet not “of” it. We can be dual citizens of God’s Kingdom and of the various earthly kingdoms we must inhabit. It is possible, in other words, by the transformation and renewal of your mind, to believe and trust in the Gospel, reaching *through and past* the things of the world to the things that truly matter. Faith, hope, and love are the means by which we embrace Christ’s invitation. They enable us to use, even to enjoy, and yet be detached from, the stuff of this world, to reach ahead for the substance of things believed in and hoped for on the grounds of Christ’s own promises.

Now, as I said at the beginning, I will finish with one more word about time. The fact is that the *time*, in the critical, providential sense meant by Jesus, is fulfilled, not only at the moment of his first preaching, but also at this very moment of our lives. We have not a day to waste; time passes very quickly, and our lives really are quite fleeting. [The other night, I heard an elegant elderly lady say, “It seems like I have breakfast every fifteen minutes!”] Our lives are also precious, to us and to God. So let us once again stop, turn, and hear the word of our Lord, “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.”

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.