

Embracing Compassion Third Week of Lent Friday, March 4, 2016 8:15 AM
Hos 14:2-10; **Mk 12:28b-34** (St. Casimir) (Are we in the kingdom of God?)

“And when Jesus saw that he had answered with the understanding, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’”

So are any of you satisfied with being not far from the kingdom of God? Actually, most people are, but Jesus wasn’t. **He was inviting people into the kingdom of God, to recognize its reality within them and among them.**

Now why was this scribe not far? Well, because he acknowledged Jesus’ perception in seeing the key to the whole Torah of God as loving God with your whole heart, mind, and soul, which is from Deuteronomy—Jesus didn’t make it up—and loving your neighbor as yourself, which is from Leviticus 19. And Jesus didn’t make that up either; **what he did was to connect the two and to say that they were the summary of everything else.** This scribe, who was part of the Pharisee party, which is the party of Torah, the party of righteousness, the party of obedience to God, recognized this very prudent, shrewd insight into what is really the greatest law. Further, **he also saw that** following the Law, which of course would be typical for any Pharisee, **following the Law is much better than any sacrifice.**

Now here of course they would have a big argument with another group of Jews, those who saw the Temple as the center of everything, nothing more important than the Temple. And there were a lot of them too.

But why did Jesus say you are close to the kingdom but not in it, or not with it, or it hasn’t really penetrated into your being? The reason is this, that the Pharisee party, holy as they were, dedicated as they were, faithful as they were, devout as they were, lacked something. And this comes up over and over again. **They lacked compassion.** They saw what to do, but then

those who failed, they were not compassionate toward them. In fact, **they were constantly complaining about Jesus befriending the sinner.** This is a complaint that runs through all four gospels and it's constant. So this young man was not far from the kingdom, because he knew what had to be done. **He knew what was really good and what was really right, but he wasn't really part of the whole thing.**

And so we read the gospel of Mark and we realize that Mark is talking to us; **Jesus through Mark is talking to us. Are we in the kingdom of God?** Do we acknowledge it among us, or are we just not far? **Have we really embraced compassion? Do we really look at those who are broken and who are failures with the kind of love that God does, that God has extended toward them in Christ?**