

Homily For Saturday of the 20th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - August 20, 2022

St. Bernard Memorial

Ezekiel 43:1-7 "This is the place of my throne where I will reside among the people of Israel forever."

Psalms 85:8-13 "His salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land."

Matt 23:1-12 "Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah."

To God Be the Glory

Introduction

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to visit St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. What an awesome monument to the Lord, reminding one of the many great cathedrals of Europe, which were designed and built over the centuries to honour God and to make people look up in absolute awe and wonder. In St. Patrick's, there are a number of side altars and shrines to great saints. Having Bernard as my middle name, which came to me from my paternal grandfather, I paid special attention to this particular shrine. Written there about St. Bernard was the strange statement that he had 27 friends to whom he was a spiritual brother and father. To this day, I don't know what the significance was of him having 27 friends.

Later that year, my wife and I were walking the Camino de Santiago in Spain. Every few days, I was sending emails to a list of family and friends, telling them of our progress. Remembering what I had read about Bernard, I thought, hmmm, I wonder ... so I counted the people on my distribution list and, you won't believe me, except it is true, there were exactly 27 people. Over the years, this has reminded me of our teaching about our connection to the saints in heaven, the Church triumphant. This relationship is part of God's plan to draw you and I to our eternal home with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. So today, we honour this great saint, not because he is wonderful, but because he was wonderfully faithful, giving God the glory in everything he said and did, and sharing that great faith with those around him, not just 27, I am sure.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel's vision of the glory of God entering and filling the temple should also fill us with awe. Chapter 11 told us of Ezekiel's vision of God leaving the temple and going east. This new vision is of God returning, very clearly stated, from the East. This is a rich vision that ties together key aspects of salvation history which Christians today should note. First, when Adam and Eve left the garden, the place of innocence and intimacy, because of their disobedience, they went East. Perhaps they thought it was forever. The eventual hoped for return to the idyllic state of friendship with God is perceived as a return from the East.

When the people of Jerusalem were taken from their city and their beautiful temple into captivity, they were taken East to Babylon. They thought that God was gone forever, along with the land of promise they had inhabited. However, Ezekiel's earlier vision was about the fact that, because of their idolatry and increasing sinfulness, God had already left them. God is always with a people who live justly and worship properly. Where did God go according to the vision? He went east to Babylon so that, when the people were ready to recognize their terrible sinfulness, God would be there to give them new hearts of flesh, to replace their stony hearts which had turned from him.

This last vision tells of the Lord returning to the temple from the east. Regardless of the rebuilding of the temple later on, the vision means that there is a place within a repentant people for God's glory to be manifested once again. This should encourage us because, no matter how much the culture around us abandons God, he will always return, in glory, to a people of repentant hearts.

The legend and the hope, even today amongst some Jews, is that God's Messiah will return to Jerusalem from the East. Well, guess what!!! The steps up to what remains of the temple foundation wall face East, across the Kidron Valley. Why is that significant? Because it was from there that Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly with people waving palms to welcome the Messiah. While there, Jesus proclaimed himself to be the new temple wherein the glory of God would dwell for all people. More importantly, across that valley is the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed, and from where he was taken to Jerusalem in

chains and killed, but where he would be raised from the dead to become the new temple of God's glory, manifested to the ends of the earth, to be worshipped and adored and glorified.

The early Christians always prayed ad orientem, that is towards the East. Eucharist was celebrated at dawn, at the rising of the sun, the reminder of the resurrection of the Son of God, with the priest and the people facing the east. Now, today, we have stopped building churches to orient the people to the East. However, at the consecration of every Eucharist, what do we see happening but the fulfilling of God's presence filling the temple and dwelling amongst the people in their presence. The promise is fulfilled at every Eucharist.

Matthew

In the Gospel today, we see the grand finale to the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. It is an expose of corruption among Israel's teachers. but also a warning to Christian leaders of all times. Jesus begins by recognizing the authority of the scribes and Pharisees. The chair represents the authority to teach Torah, the law of Moses himself. It's not that they don't practice what they preach regarding the strict ritual purity laws. It's that they don't seem to care about whatever burdens this places on people and whether it is leading to holiness or an empty observance. It's about the ritual and not about compassion.

Jesus is not opposed to religious dress or expressions of honour. What he criticizes is calling attention to one's practice of religion for the sake of receiving honour from people rather than the approval of God. He stresses the humility of those in authority: rabbis, teachers, fathers, lest they think of themselves as superior to those in their care. Don't compare yourself to your father in heaven. The earliest Christians did not understand Jesus to forbid calling people rabbi or father. Both Stephen and Paul address people as brothers and fathers. The word appears in other places referring to natural fathers and spiritual fathers. Jesus words represent a warning against seeking titles of honour. Bernard was such a father.

Call To Action

As a child Bernard prayed about his vocation, and at the age of twenty-two left his worldly wealth to become a Cistercian monk. Bernard's reputation for holiness and piety was widely known. He was a man of reform. Perhaps the Jesus we see in today's gospel would especially appreciate Bernard for his effective opposition to the appointment of unworthy men to Church offices.

Today, once more, Jesus Christ presents to us a request for humility before the glory of God, that he may dwell in us like the temple we are called to be. Today, let us commit to being one of the friends of St. Bernard and, indeed, all the saints who never stop worshipping in awe of the glorious presence of God.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Filled with a spirit of understanding, blessed Bernard ministered streams of clear teaching to the people of God.*

Collect: *O God, who made of the Abbot Saint Bernard a man consumed with zeal for your house, grant that we may be on fire with the same spirit.*

Ezekiel: *Then the angel brought me to the gate facing east. The glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. The sound like mighty waters and shining with his glory. And I fell upon my face. As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, the spirit lifted me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. I heard out of the temple: Mortal, this is the place of my throne where I will reside among the people of Israel forever.*

Psalm: *The Lord will speak peace to his people. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet. Righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.*

Matthew: *Jesus said to the crowds and disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. Therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it. But do not do as they do, for they do not practise what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others, but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. They love to have the place of honour at banquets and synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father, the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest*

among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Bernard: Another French saint. One of 7 children. All were offered to the service of God by a holy mother. He prayed about a vocation. Four of his brothers joined him at the monastery. Reputation for holiness. a man of reform. Opposed unworthy men appointed to church positions. Doctor of the Church. vBurning passion and love for God. His homilies really present the love of God.