

Homily For Tuesday of the 5th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am/7:00pm Masses - Feb 8, 2022

1 Kings 8:22-30 "Even the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built."

Psalms 84:1-10 "How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord, mighty God!"

Mark 7:1-13 "This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."

A Dwelling Place for God

Introduction

As you know, the tabernacle is the tiny house where Jesus, our Lord, humbles himself to dwell, contained in that little space, living there in between masses, faithfully remaining there even hour after hour when there is no one in the church to worship him as he deserves. He dwells in every tabernacle in many thousands of churches throughout the world. Of course, that is not really God's purpose, just to hang out in tabernacles. He will not ever be contained there. He waits there until we are ready to receive him into our bodies and our hearts at mass. These hearts are where our God truly wants to live.

Not far from here, a few years ago, I was assisting at the rededication of a church after a renovation. Bishop Henry at the time was going around to various parts of the sanctuary, saying prayers while offering the smoke of incense. It was quite beautiful right up to a climactic moment at the tabernacle, which did not yet contain the Blessed Sacrament of our Lord's Body and Blood. Just as the Bishop was incensing the tabernacle, the smoke set off the fire alarm. That was not the way we had intended to honour God. Bishop Henry's next words were: "At least we know the fire alarm works." Perhaps it was all in God's plan that there should be firefighters present at this dedication of God's house.

Today, we have three profound manifestations of God's desire to dwell with humans.

1 Kings

First is King Solomon at the dedication of the first Jerusalem temple. God had dwelled with the people in a tent until that time. Solomon was commissioned by his father, King David and, more importantly, by God, to build this temple where the people could offer sacrifice and worship the God who had established them, who had led them, and who had saved them.

Solomon was not the priest, but he showed his leadership by offering the dedication prayer on behalf of the people. It says that he spread out his hands as he prayed. Later, the Christians prayed like this. There are images drawn on the walls of the catacombs at Rome of Christians praying in what is called the 'orans', or prayer, posture. It is the posture of the priest who presides at mass.

What I think is amazing about his prayer is that, from the beginning of that beautiful temple, which had every beautiful material and the best of workmanship, that man who is king over an entire people recognizes that God is transcendent. Even that beautiful place is not the ultimate dwelling of God. Solomon recognizes the mystery of the God of the universe who conforms himself, who humbles himself to live with people.

Psalm

Psalm 84 expresses the desire of a pilgrim to the temple, who longs to have this same God live with him. While admiring the majesty and beauty, it is more a longing that all of us need to cultivate in our hearts, to grow in love for God and to dwell with him more closely.

Mark

With Jesus' words today, we have to look a little deeper to see the same theme. When Jesus uses harsh language, it kind of goes against the most common image of him, that he was a kind and loving healer and teacher. There is a major temptation that many fall prey to, which is to reinterpret him only as "gentle Jesus, meek and mild." Of course, He is gentle towards the broken hearted, but much of the time, he commands people to allow God to be who He is and to stop

keeping him in a box of our own making. That is what hand washing had become. In the Book of Exodus, the law of God laid down how priests should wash before offering sacrifice. Jewish tradition had extended this to all Jews before every meal, in an effort to give meals a religious significance, which was reflected in the blessings which marked the start of meals. Ritual purification was a symbol of the moral purity a person should have when approaching God. That all sounds very good, but the Pharisees had focussed on the mere external rite. They were not truly making a dwelling place for God in their own hearts. Worse, they were not teaching this wisdom of Solomon and the psalmist to the people who looked to them for proper teaching.

When Jesus is angry, we need to pay attention. I need to pay attention. It is in my unredeemed human nature to do exactly what the Pharisees are doing, to pay attention to the wrong things and, therefore, not make space for God to make his dwelling place in me. But Christ has redeemed me by his body and blood and is ready to make his home in me if I will give proper humble worship.

True Worship

There is no worse virus than the one which causes pride in my own accomplishments take precedence over what God has accomplished for me in a way that I could not have done for myself. This virus spreads easily until it takes over an entire culture. This should be what we are most afraid of, because this is separation from the one who only wants to heal us of our spiritual sickness. The only cure is to be inoculated by God's abiding presence. Through this means, God can break through our disease and build in us a house wherein He can dwell.

That's what the saints do. That's what today's amazing saint - Bakhita of Sudan - did. No matter how badly she was treated, she became one of the great modern temples of God's holy presence. She is the reason that this day, February 8th, has been designated as the International Day of Prayer to Stop Human Trafficking. Let us pray to her today that she will help us become a home for God.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *See, I have God for my help. The Lord sustains my soul. I will praise your name, O Lord, for it is good.*

Collect: *Show favour, O Lord, to your servants and mercifully increase the gifts of your grace.*

2 Kings: *On the day of the dedication of the temple, King Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. He said, "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath. Even the highest heaven cannot contain, you, much less this house that I have built! Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place.*

Psalms: *How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord, mighty God! Even the sparrow finds a home. Happy are those who live in your house. For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.*

Mark: *The Pharisees and some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and asked, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" Jesus said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written: This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines."*