

God's True Presence  
Homily for July 19, 2019  
15<sup>th</sup> Week Ordinary Time

In today's Gospel we are told that Jesus passes through the grain fields. St Hilary of Poitiers who died in 397 looked at this allegorically. He said Christ's passing through the field signifies his passing into the world through the Incarnation. The standing grain is the harvest of souls ready to believe in the gospel and be gathered into the Church by the hungry disciples.<sup>1</sup>

This allegorical reading of the text is something our early ancestors in the faith did masterfully. As followers of Jesus we are to be those who are hungry for the harvest of souls, looking forward to having others come into the fellowship that is ours in Christ, because of who he is.

Nothing highlights who he is more vividly than his statement to be the Lord of the Sabbath. It's hard to express how breathtaking this claim would be for a first-century Jew to make. Yahweh alone could be assigned the title "Lord of the Sabbath," so what is Jesus implying?

In short, he is claiming that he is above their rituals, even perhaps the defining practice of pious Jews, because he is the Lord. Thus, the rules must be placed in subordination to the kingdom of God, the kingdom that the Lord Jesus is ushering in even here and now.<sup>2</sup>

In order to make his point abundantly clear Jesus refers to the two most significant institutions in ancient Israel, Davidic Kingship and the Temple.

Jesus draws on the parallels between 1 Sam 21:1–6 and his own situation. As David's companions were hungry (12:1), so were the disciples; as David was heir to the United Kingdom of Israel, so Jesus is the son of David. He thus implies that if his disciples are in sin, then David himself would stand guilty—a conclusion nowhere suggested in the Old Testament<sup>3</sup>

He then moves from the Davidic kingdom to drawing a parallel with the Levitical priests who worked every sabbath, replacing the bread of Presence in the Temple (Lev 24:5–9) and offering sacrifice (Num 28:9–10). Nevertheless, they remained guiltless<sup>4</sup>. Jesus then gets really bold. For a 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jew there was no jurisdiction of greater importance than the Temple. The Herodian Temple was still under construction at the time of Jesus. To took decades to build and was the defining institution for a 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jew.

The Jerusalem Temple was spectacular because it housed the very presence of God among his people. God's presence in Jesus, as the divine Son, exceeds that in the Temple as we read both at the beginning and end of Matthew's Gospel.

Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"  
which means, "God is with us."<sup>5</sup>

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.<sup>6</sup>

Now it is interesting to note that while Mark and Luke also have this controversial story, they only have Jesus quoting the Davidic reference. They omit the Temple reference. This is significant. Of the four Gospels Matthew's audience was primarily Jewish, whereas Luke and Mark were directed towards non-Jews. Therefore, Matthew is explicit in declaring that it is no longer the Temple that houses the very presence of God, but Jesus is God with us.

What can we conclude from this? The Bread of the Presence is now available to us through the Eucharist – where the Lord is made present to us, not just weekly, but daily.

As we have our spiritual hunger satiated by this bread made from wheat, we are to be that community that hungers to mercifully extend Jesus' gracious generosity to others so they too can share in the harvest and taste and see the Lord is good by coming to know his loving presence in their lives too.