

Homily.4Advent12.20.20
Saint Bernard Church
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A HOUSE FOR GOD

If you wanted to understand the Bible in a simple way, you could say it's really all about houses.

This theme is prominent in our First Reading today, from the 2nd Book of Samuel. King David was bothered by the fact that he lived in a grand palace while the Ark of the Covenant, representing God's presence, dwelt in a tent. King David very badly wanted to build a more suitable house for the Lord.

But then, God told David, through the prophet Nathan, that God would build His own house. And it was through Solomon, David's son, that God built a fabulous temple for Himself in Jerusalem. In the temple was the Holy of Holies, separated by a veil from the rest of the temple. Only the high priest was allowed to enter in the Holy of Holies, to burn incense and sprinkle sacrificial blood. The Holy of Holies enshrined the Ark of the Covenant.

Solomon's temple in Jerusalem became the center of Jewish worship for Yahweh. Destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, in 586 B.C., it was rebuilt in 516 B.C.

At the very moment that Jesus died, the veil in the temple in Jerusalem was torn, symbolizing that the ancient sanctuary had lost its sacred character. The Jerusalem temple was ultimately destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

Today's Gospel is also about a house for God. But instead of a building, this house, this temple, is a woman, the first human tabernacle for Jesus. In the womb of this woman, God chose, through the Holy Spirit, to place his Son, the true Holy of Holies.

What qualified Mary to be the first place where Jesus Christ would dwell?

I'm going to focus on two of her many qualities.

First of all, Mary was a humble, willing servant, completely surrendering her will to the will of the Lord.

Secondly, Mary understood and embraced a new reality about herself arising from the presence of Jesus in her. When she went to see Elizabeth, who was also pregnant, the presence of Jesus in Mary caused the child in Elizabeth's womb to leap for joy.

Mary realized that the presence of Jesus in her could be detected by others, that His presence radiated out from her and brought joy to others.

The encounter with Elizabeth and her unborn child inspired Mary to exclaim, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit exalts in God my savior, for He has looked with mercy on my lowliness."

The Catholic Church assumed the role of Mary, to reveal and share the presence of Jesus with the world. Through the Church, the physical presence of Jesus is in this house, Saint Bernard Church, and in all other Catholic churches.

Where does this leave all of us, you and me?

Well, we are houses for God, we are temples, too.

Saint Paul tells the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:9: "For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building."

He adds in verse 16: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person, for the temple of God, which you are, is holy."

St. Paul repeats himself in Chapter 6, verses 19-20, of the same letter. He writes: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body."

We are not our own. Jesus bought us. He paid for us with His life. We now belong to Him. Just as God built a temple for the Jewish people, Jesus made out of us a temple for Himself.

This reality is best captured by St. Paul in another letter of his, the Letter to the Galatians. In verses 19 and 20, he makes the most powerful statement a Christian can make. He says, "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given Himself up for me."

“I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.”

In what human person is this statement the most true? Even truer than it was for St. Paul?

Mary. She surrendered her life to God. She gave up her own life so that Christ could live in her. And she knew that when she did this she would magnify Jesus to the world, wherever the Holy Spirit led her.

Mary is our model, the example of how we can and should be living.

Advent is a time to reflect on the coming of Jesus. To ask ourselves, have I completely surrendered to Jesus? Have I truly welcomed Him into my life? Is He magnified by the way I live?

In just a few minutes, most of us will be houses for God, temples for His Son. Like Mary, we will have Jesus living in us, physically and spiritually.

It's a good time for us to consider, “Who is the center of my life? Is it me, or Jesus? Do I see myself as completely belonging to Him? When I leave Mass, will Jesus be magnified in my life? Will others know that Jesus is living in me?”

To be a temple, a house for Jesus, we strive to be like Mary. Humble, meek, obedient. So Jesus can look upon our lowliness, and do what He wants to with us. So we can say, like Mary, “the Mighty one has done great things for us, and holy is His name.”

[A closing prayer]

Mary, humble handmaid of the Lord, we need your example today to discover God's will in our lives. You always gave God the first place in your life. Just as you pondered his Word in your heart, help each of us to seek his plan in all that we do. Give us the conviction that nothing is more important than doing the will of our heavenly Father. May we spend each moment in loving and pleasing him. Help us to follow your example in proclaiming, “I am the servant of the Lord. I will what God wills, when he wills it, as he wills it, because he wills it.”