

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Feb 10th 2014

I have truly built you a princely house, a dwelling where you may abide forever. (1 Kings 8:13)

Lord, go up to the place of your rest! (Psalm 132:8)

On most days, I only see the sun through a patient's window in the hospital. My refrigerator is chronically low on the "essentials" as I rarely have time to get to the grocery store. I am frequently required to work through the weekends. I feel guilty each night that I do not spend at least some time reading about diagnoses or medical treatments. On many of my rotations as an internal medicine resident, I'm just trying to stay afloat and "do no harm." Meanwhile, my family commands a portion of my attention and I yearn for the blessing of starting my own family. Even if God can find a place in my heart, will it be a restful place?

What strikes me most about today's readings are the juxtaposition between the relaxed, joy-filled focus on a "resting place" in the first reading and psalm contrasted with the chaos of Jesus' ministry to the sick in the Gospel. Both Solomon and our psalmist emphasize giving God a place to "abide" and "rest." But then the crowds, the pleas, the demands on Jesus' time and attention, and the need to move on to a new place of need afterward certainly seem to be anything but restful!

In the Old Testament, the Israelites gave God a physical "abode" in the Ark of the Covenant, which stored his Word written on Moses' tablets. With Jesus' coming, the Word became Flesh and is now offered to each of us at Mass fully present in the Eucharist. When we receive that Word made Flesh into our bodies, we ourselves become Tabernacles and a place of rest for our Lord. But how many of us can say with certainty that our hearts are peaceful "Tabernacles" for Jesus' presence?

I respond to the psalm, "Lord, go up to the place of your rest!" and immediately think that certainly that place is not in my chaotic heart. And yet, it very well may be that my demanding vocation is precisely what makes my heart a "princely house" and a place where my Lord desires to "abide forever." Perhaps Jesus prefers to rest in a heart that is actively living out the vocation that he has laid before it. Jesus always seems most at peace and most alive when he was spending himself in the service of others. I, too, can echo that sentiment. Isn't it during times when I am fully using my God-given skills and energy to serve him that I feel God most at work in me?

Lord, show us what we can do to make our hearts more suitable places of rest for you. Come into those places of our hearts where we feel that no one could find peace and make your home there.

Grant us the joy that comes from living out the vocation you have laid before each of us.

Sam Pierre