

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Feb 9th 2016

Today's readings begin with a prayer of Solomon, who took up the monumental task of building the temple. Solomon understands that a temple built by human hands could not begin to contain God, who is greater than all His creation (of which the temple is but a small part, even though majestic by human standards). But Solomon requests that God condescend, listening to prayers and granting pardon.

We humans are comforted by setting apart space for the divine. True enough, we can find God in all things and everywhere. But when we enter into sacred space, which is set apart from the mundane tasks of daily living, we can be drawn into deeper contemplation and a deeper experience. And as we draw near to those spaces, we become more aware of God's presence there. He is not far off at any time, to be sure, but somehow we are not always able to sense that reality until we draw ourselves away from the distractions of our daily living, not to mention the dysfunctions that distort us on account of our own sins.

As we approach the Lenten season, this possibility of drawing away from these distractions may become a more attractive idea. I have found that the seasons of the church tap into our human experiences in relationships. Think about the warm fire in your fireplace on a cool winter night. We are drawn to the light and warmth. But when warmed, we may need to draw back for a time, taking in the light from a greater distance. Then the cycle continues, and we are drawn in by our senses, which recognize our need to be near the fire.

The Gospel for today suggests that sometimes, our sensibilities need to be reawakened. Our sins may deaden our sensibilities, and we need a reset! Jesus did not mince words with the Pharisees in this story. His frank rebuke may sound harsh to our ears, but sometimes we need more than a nudge to get us back to our senses!

During this Lenten season, let us draw near to the fire. Let us enter into the sacred space. And let us come to our senses, seeing ourselves more clearly in its light and receiving its warmth in our hearts, that can sometimes grow cold, too. Thanks be to God that he indeed hears our prayers and condescends to help us, always.

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