

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Mar 21st 2024

God lives in the hearts of his people

Jesus continues to challenge the Jews about his identity. “Whoever keeps my word will never see death.” They could not understand anything beyond the literal meaning of the spoken words, and naturally, they failed to grasp the meaning of “never seeing death.” Today’s readings set before us God’s promises. The first reading spoke of God’s promise to father Abraham, and the Gospel promises those who believe in Jesus a life without death!

Each of us has been chosen. We are Christians because the Lord has chosen us. The choice is always of God, but he has given us the freedom to believe in his promises. Abraham was chosen by God and was given the promise of becoming the father of a host of nations. Abraham believed in the promises and entered into a covenant with God – a commitment for life.

In today’s Gospel, John presents the argument between Jesus and the religious scholars, where the Pharisees kept repeating: “there are laws we must observe!”. All they cared about was fulfilling the laws, and they thought they could please God by observing the laws. Pope Francis says, “They did so because their hearts were closed, their minds were closed. “When our hearts and minds are closed, there is no room for God. Jesus cannot convince a closed mind; it is impossible to give a new message”.

The Pharisees in today’s Gospel had one single way of thinking, and they wanted to impose their way of thinking on everyone else. Jesus reproaches them for adopting a “theology that was a slave to their rigid-mindedness. Today the uniform thought - or considering my way as the only right way - has been made into an idol.

The Gospel is a challenge for us today to acknowledge our identity as Christians and believe in the promises of Christ. We are Christians because, like Abraham and Blessed Virgin Mother, we have said yes to God’s choice. “They took up stones to throw at him,” we read in the Gospel... “Jesus hid himself and left the temple.” In the prologue, too, John wrote about this rejection: “He came to his own, and his own people did not accept him.”

The Pharisees took stones to throw at him, but Jesus “...left the temple.” And “he left the Temple”. Remember the Gospel account, when Jesus died on the cross, the veil guarding the Holy of Holies in the temple split right open, revealing that God was no longer there. He had left the temple. And he now dwells in a new Temple, among the people, the Church, the Body of Christ.