

## Build God's Home, not just God's Temple!

**Fourth Sunday of Advent** – Cycle B – 20 December 2020

**Readings:** 2 Sam 7:1-5, 8-12, 14a, 16; Rom 16:25-27; Lk 1:26-38

*“The LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house”* (2 Sam 7:11)

Prologue: Temple, house and home are rich biblical images that can be woven together as a theme for today's readings and reflections. While 'temple' always signifies a sacred, set-apart structure for God, 'house' and 'home' could have both human-and-divine nuances. Moreover, while 'house' is necessary for basic, human physical survival, 'home' has added connotations in the emotional, mental, spiritual and familial realms. Interestingly, in today's readings one can see both, God and humans building houses and homes, and establishing households to last forever.

### Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. “Now when the king [David] was settled in his *house* ...” (v.1) — is the opening line of the first reading, referring to the comfortable dwelling in which King David resided and reigned from, after being anointed king of all the tribes of Israel and Judah (see 2 Sam 5). Clinching Jerusalem for himself from the jaws of the Jebusites, he planned to make it both, his political as well as the religious capital to ensure continued loyalty to him of all the tribes. Thus, he brought the ‘Ark of the Covenant’ — which, till then was but a tent signifying the localized presence of Yahweh, God — to Jerusalem. He then tells Prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the Ark of God stays in a tent” (v.2) disclosing his desire to build a temple for God to dwell in. Feeling that he is on the right track, Nathan says: “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you” (v.3). However, that night, through Nathan's dream, God asks, seemingly sarcastically: “Are *you* the one to build *me* a house?” We are told that it was David's son, Solomon, not David, who was chosen to build God's house (see 1 Kings 5:2-5). Yet, reminding David of the bountiful blessings he received from the days he was but a shepherd, God promises David, “The Lord will make *you* a house” (v.11). The ‘house’ here does not refer to any ‘building’ but to his ‘household’ or ‘dynasty’. God makes a covenant with David, promising him: “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth *from your body*, and I will establish his kingdom” (v.12), and, “Your *house* and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me” (v.16).
2. Prophecies and promises like the above inflamed the hearts of the Israelites who began to bank more upon their own resources—their ‘God's chosen people’ identity, king and temple—rather than trust The One who bestowed all these upon them. Alas, their hubris and hardheartedness led to the destruction of the Davidic monarchy during the Exile. Yet, deep within their communitarian psyche, there burned the embers of hope in some future Messiah who would deliver them from bondage and ensure power and prosperity, once again. They were right in harbouring ‘great expectations’ but wrong in the ‘image’ of the one who was to come as saviour. The movement from the Old Covenant/Testament to the New Covenant/Testament, from Jerusalem to Nazareth, from David to Joseph, from Zechariah to Mary, from John to Jesus is so striking that mention must be made of the God of surprises who reverses roles, raises the lowly, and builds homes for us and in us, rather than the other way around. John's birth is announced in the sacred sanctuary of a temple in Jerusalem, while Jesus' birth in a poor house in an unknown village: Nazareth. Moreover, while John is born to a venerable male priest and his aged, barren wife, Elizabeth, God's word, Jesus, will take flesh in the Spirit-induced union of a young virgin, Mary, and her silent, yet strong-as-steel betrothed “Joseph, of the *house* of David” (v.27). God is now going to build a home for you and for me, in you and in me.

3. Annunciation stories of the births of Isaac, Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist are announced in advance since they are key figures in the history of salvation. Normally, these births are miraculous, involving aged, barren couples. Today's annunciation is different. Virgin Mary is made an offer not to begin a natural family as the outcome of her love for one man, but as the fruit of God's and her love for all of humankind. In Hebrew, 'house' is conveyed by the word '*shekinah*'. In Bible history, God's *shekinah* is located and localized in the 'tent of encounter' (Ex 33:7-11; Num 12:4-8) and the 'ark of the covenant'. But now, God's *shekinah* is assuming flesh-and-blood within the womb of a Davidic descendent, Mary, who faithfully says, "Here am I, the servant/handmaid of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (v.38). In her own hometown, her word to obey God's word is amplified by the wordless assent of another Davidic descendent, Joseph, who together with Mary will build God's home faraway from any temple as "God's Word will become flesh and dwell among us" (Jn 1:14). Indeed, Mary becomes the *shekinah* wherein the *Godman* Jesus' flesh, blood and bones are being formed.

#### **Linking the Psalm and the Second Reading to the General Theme:**

- Today's psalm (89) is a perfect response to the first reading since it directly deals with Davidic messianism: "I have sworn to David my servant, I will establish your dynasty forever." Truly, Yahweh is faithful to the divine promises in the fullness of time.
- Paul's letter to the Romans is very different from his letters to other communities which he had visited, lived with and evangelized. By contrast, the community at Rome was founded by others. Yet, Paul exhorts them to rejoice, for, in the interplay between 'mystery' and 'history' God was revealing something so surpassingly supreme "to all the nations" (v.26), that one only had to offer one's "obedience of faith" and give glory to God (vv.26,27).

**Prayer for our reflection:** *"The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us..... We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future that is not our own. Amen."*  
This prayer was attributed to St Romero but is actually composed by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, drafted for a homily by Cardinal John Dearden in November 1979 for a celebration of departed priests.

**Tale-piece to Think About:** Three stonecutters were involved in the construction of a temple. When asked what they were doing, the first one replied, "I'm breaking stones!" The second answered, "I'm earning a living!" The third joyfully exclaimed, "I'm building God's House!" Let us cooperate in building God's House, our world, much as God is building a temple within us (1 Cor 6:19). Mary is mother of Jesus' historical and mystical House and Body, the Church as she prayed for its birth (Acts 1:14). Let's look at her, learn from her and linger beside her.

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