

Readings for the 25th Thursday of the

FIRST READING: Ezra 6:7-8, 12b, 14-20

A reading from the Book of Ezra:

King Darius issued an order to the officials of West-of-Euphrates: "Let the governor and the elders of the Jews continue the work on that house of God; they are to rebuild it on its former site. I also issue this decree concerning your dealing with these elders of the Jews in the rebuilding of that house of God: From the royal revenue, the taxes of West-of-Euphrates, let these men be repaid for their expenses, in full and without delay. I, Darius, have issued this decree; let it be carefully executed." The elders of the Jews continued to make progress in the building, supported by the message of the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, son of Iddo. They finished the building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus and Darius and of Artaxerxes, king of Persia. They completed this house on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. The children of Israel—priests, Levites, and the other returned exiles—celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. For the dedication of this house of God, they offered one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs, together with twelve he-goats as a sin-offering for all Israel, in keeping with the number of the tribes of Israel. Finally, they set up the priests in their classes and the Levites in their divisions for the service of God in Jerusalem, as is prescribed in the book of Moses. The exiles kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. The Levites, every one of whom had purified himself for the occasion, sacrificed the Passover for the rest of the exiles, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4ab, 4cd-5

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

I rejoiced because they said to me, "We will go up to the house of the LORD." And now we have set foot within your gates, O Jerusalem.

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Jerusalem, built as a city with compact unity. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD.

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

According to the decree for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. In it are set up judgment seats, seats for the house of David.

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

ALLELUIA: Luke 11:28

Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel: Luke 8:19-21

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

The mother of Jesus and his brothers came to him but were unable to join him because of the crowd. He was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and they wish to see you." He said to them in reply, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 25th Thursday of the Year (After the Saturday and Sunday Town Hall Meetings)

What were the priorities in the mind of Haggai for God and God's people? Why was it so important to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem? Did the Jewish people really believe that God had an actual address? I remember the old Latin prayers at mass, God's address and phone number; *quia tu est Deus, fortitu domea* and *et cum spiritu tuo* (the pun only works if you read these out loud). Did this mean that God lived inside the temple? Was the infinite, eternal, all powerful creator God confined to the interior of a building? The notion is absurd. Yet, don't we sometimes refer to a church as the house of God?

Exactly what is God's true home? God lives in, through, with, among and within God's people. Perhaps, as the Archdiocese continues its relentless and necessary consolidation project, we all need to remember where we know the presence of Jesus. "When two or three gather in my name, I am in their midst." We become the Mystical Body of Christ when we gather together; i.e. the Church. Our parish building is not God's home; it is merely the worship-space where the Church of Jesus gathers. My father always spoke of attending Church on the hood of a jeep during WWII. It wasn't the location; it was the gathering of the faithful that became the Church.

The gospels told us that. The other way they've told us, "They knew him (Jesus) in the breaking of the bread." Both of these lines tell us that the place of God cannot be limited in any way. Our gathering together is what draws us Sunday after Sunday for most of us and day after day for fewer. It has never been about bricks, mortar, plumbing and air-conditioning, though, I have to admit, it is a priority to be able to pay the bills and effect repairs on them. It is always about the gathering of Christ's Church together and to remember and give thanks for all God does for us.

The words we use as we gather for mass, Communion and Eucharist have specific meanings to that regard. Communion comes from two Latin words; *cum* (meaning with) and *unus* (meaning union or as one). We gather with each other. Eucharist comes from two ancient Greek words; *eu* (meaning filled with) and *charis* (meaning gift). When we are filled with gifts we are thankful. We give God thanks. As we gather in thanksgiving, which is our action, we also receive thanks and union back as we receive the Eucharist in Communion. We, the Mystical Body of Christ gather to give thanks and receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Where we do this is not as important as doing it, together.

When we face the inevitable and, as we have heard, there are several options, we are still together. We can focus on what we will gain instead of what we can lose. We, as the parish of Divine Savior are gifted as a community. We have much to offer to the communities with which we will merge. They, in turn, have much to offer us as well. As God's beloved Children and as our identity as Jesus Church, all of us involved are one in Christ before this process even began. We are widening our circle of faith and those with whom we can encounter Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Why we gather and with whom we gather is at the heart of being the Church, not where we gather.

We can thank the prophet Haggai for our misdirection.

Today's gospel is a curiosity. It is enigmatic. Herod wanted to meet Jesus but he did so out of curiosity and not in faith. There is no indication, in the gospels, that he ever moved beyond his curiosity. I'm not saying that being curious is a bad thing. On the contrary, curiosity is necessary to learn more about the world and people around us. It keeps us growing in knowledge and experience. However, to know about someone is different from knowing someone. Herod never seemed to grow deeper in a relationship with Jesus.

I had a priest friend, he died earlier this year. He heard of the Eastern Orthodox and Byzantine Catholic Jesus Prayer. The prayer is simple. Jesus, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. He kept reading books and articles about it. He wanted to know why the prayer was so popular and powerful. I pray this prayer all the time. It is a Christian mantra. One sits, quietly, and repeats the prayer over and over again while

breathing; inhaling slowly on Jesus, son of God and exhaling on have mercy on me, a sinner. It is a powerful means of calming meditation. Often I pray this prayer while stuck in traffic. It can work wonders to pass the time and to avoid getting angry at the other lousy drivers, aside from me, on the road. Praying the prayer teaches itself. As far as I know, he never did learn the prayer.

There is, in the gospels, what we call the Messianic Secret. Jesus was focused on his mission, which was to preach the Good News, serve God's people and then suffer and die on the cross. The sign of his mission's success was not his fame for being a healer and miracle worker but his rising from the dead. He wanted his followers to believe in him as God and Messiah not as a wonder worker. We view the gospel stories from a perspective Herod didn't have. We live and believe in a post Easter and Pentecost world. We have experienced the Risen Lord and Holy Spirit. Herod just saw another guy like John the Baptist whom he killed. He also had a hand in killing Jesus. We have come to know Jesus, as we gather together and in the breaking of bread. We believe.

God is in our midst. God's home is in us. Our place and home is together in Christ, wherever that may be. Our goal, as the Church, is to strive for the Kingdom of God. In faith, this is where the Spirit leads us.

May the Spirit lead and guide us as Jesus Church.

James D. Beath
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