

Moving House

Psychologists tell us that, apart from the death of a loved one, perhaps the most traumatic experience a person can have is that of moving house. Those of us who have gone through all that is involved in this particular trauma can attest to the truth contained in these words. One of the benefits derived from the exercise, however, is that we get rid of all the junk we have accumulated since our last move. It could perhaps be argued that people's dread of moving is directly proportionate to the amount of stuff they have gathered. The Israelites, having come out of Egypt, had been through the experience, and were inclined to avoid too much clutter. (One of the psalms laughs at the pagans who "carry around their idols made of wood.") Today we find Jesus clearing all the accumulated junk out of the Temple. But what is happening here is not merely the removal of unwanted items; by this symbolic act, Jesus is calling all the peoples of the earth to worship God "in spirit and in truth." True worshippers, he will tell us later in the gospel, are those who worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

Worship is not a word which figures largely in our religious vocabulary today. Like "adoration," it is a particularly God-centered word, ill-suited to be our self-centered age where religiousness is more often expressed in terms of self-actualization. There is a sense in which it is true to say that people today have forgotten how to worship, so that often even our liturgical acts become simply gatherings or experiences. To worship means to acknowledge the transcendence of God, and his claim on us as our creator, and to respond appropriately. Rather than being just a relic of primitive religion, worship is an integral part of the Judeo-Christian religious sense. From deep within our self-springs the desire to worship and adore God. Getting in tune with that desire and expressing it through word and gesture is at the heart of prayer.

In order to worship in spirit and in truth, we must prepare our hearts and minds by being faithful to the covenant relationship (keeping the commandments) and seeking the wisdom of God, which is the wisdom of the cross. We have to let Jesus cleanse us, as he cleansed the Temple, leave our sins behind, and simplify our lives, getting rid of any needless clutter. Then we are able to enter into the new Temple, which is Jesus himself, praying in and through him.

When the side of Jesus was pierced on Calvary, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The place of worship is no longer the Temple in Jerusalem; now, it is through the pierced side of Christ that we have "access to the Father in the one Spirit." So it is that, after the resurrection, Thomas will place his hand in Jesus's side and worship, saying, "My Lord and my God," as today's gospel tells us: "When Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered? and believed. If we are to properly worship God, we must leave behind everything that gets in the way, then enter into that secret chamber which is the side of Christ, and there worship the Father in spirit and in truth.