

In today's introit we pray these words from Psalm 84: "**How lovely is Your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!**" The word translated as "dwelling place," is one the main Hebrew words used for the tabernacle. It carries the sense of a firm, solid place, fixed and constant. Psalm 84 is a psalm of longing for the house of the Lord. In ancient Israel that was the tabernacle, later on the temple. That was the place on earth where the Lord God dwelt, or "tabernacled" among His people. It was the fixed and constant place where God had promised to be present for His people. He's present everywhere. That's part of what it means to be God. But where is it that man can meet God in such a way that we know that God is present there for us, for our benefit, to give and to do good to us? That is a whole other question. That is the question that matters. The temple was that place. It was the place of sacrifice; the place where blood was shed. For it is only by the shedding of blood that there is forgiveness of sins and life with God. What God says in Leviticus is absolutely true: "**The life of every creature is its blood**" (Lev 17:14).

The temple was a place of blood, fire, smoke, and offal, the odd-end makings which turn many away from hot dogs. It was a place more akin to the slaughterhouse than our churches. Yet the psalmist rightly says, "**How lovely is Your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!**" It is a beautiful place; the place where God comes to dwell, to tabernacle, with humanity. For it is there that He forgives sins and bestows life. Peter echoes the Psalm on the Mount of Transfiguration. He beholds the Lord shining in dazzling glory, where not just His face, but even His clothes reflect His glory. Mark even tells us, "**His clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them**" (Mk 9). Peter also sees those heroes of ancient Israel, Moses and Elijah standing "**in glory**" beside Jesus (Lk 9). In that blissful moment Peter says, "**Lord, it is good that we are here. If You wish, I will make three tents,**" three tabernacles, "**here, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah.**"

A mountaintop experience if ever there was one! But wait one minute. Consider the mountains of the Old Testament. Consider the mountaintop moments of Moses and Elijah's ministries. You heard one today in the Old Testament reading (Ex 3). Moses is at "**Horeb, the mountain of God.**" The Lord tabernacles, He dwells, for that moment in fiery glory "**in midst of a bush,**" which, though "**burning, yet it was not consumed.**" And when God speaks to Moses, identifying Himself as the God of Moses' fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we are told that "**Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.**"

Later on, when Moses brings the children of Israel back to the mountain to receive the commandments and laws of God, we are told that "**the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel**" (Ex 24:17). A few chapters earlier the warning was given: any person, any animal, who touched the mountain, would be put to death (Ex 19:12). The author to the Hebrews reminds us, "**our God is a consuming fire**" (Heb 12:29). God's glory, His presence, His voice, is terrifying. His holiness cannot abide that which is sinful and unclean. Not exactly the image of a lovely place. Not exactly the sort of place we would want to be.

Consider also the place of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18). The fire of God's glory descends to consume Elijah's sacrifice, and Elijah goes on to execute swift and bloody justice on the hundreds of false prophets. God's glory that day shows that the Lord of hosts accepts no divided loyalties. And the history of Israel and Judah show us in utter clarity that God will not be mocked. He is long-suffering, He is patient. But that should not be mistaken for indifference. And when people, even entire nations, continually thumb their nose before God's holy commandments, judgment will come. So the mountains where God descends teach us a powerful lesson. They call us to repentance.

The Father speaks on the Mount of Transfiguration, and understandably Peter and James and John fall on their faces in terror. They know their history. Not just of their fathers and the mountains of God, but their own personal history. For those who have the ears to hear, the voice of God immediately brings the knowledge of sin. The God whose voice they heard is the God who commanded that all who set foot on the mountain where He dwelt should die. This is the God who even Moses, the greatest of all the prophets, could not see in all His glory. This is the God who exposed and eliminated not just the openly ungodly adherents of a false religion, but all those of Israel who refused to repent of their sin. Peter, James, John, you, and I, are right to be afraid.

But the psalmist's words are true: **"How lovely is Your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!"** And as mistaken as Peter is in his suggestion to build tabernacles, firm, constant buildings, that they might all stay in this sublime glory forever, Peter's confession that it is good to be there in that moment is absolutely right. Because what is made absolutely clear to Peter and to us, poor sinners alike, is that the One who is there with them, in all His shining glory, the beloved Son, is Himself the dwelling place, the tabernacle, the location where God dwells with man.

We heard it on Christmas Day: **"the Word became flesh and dwelt"** tabernacled, **"among us, and we have seen His glory"** (Jn 1:14). And what we heard on Christmas, that truth, that in Jesus God dwells with men as a man, is heard once again as part of the reason He should be put to death. On the night of His trial before the leaders of Israel we hear the charge: **"This Man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days'"** (Matt 26:61). But this lovely temple, the beautiful place where God dwells with man, which the Lord said would be destroyed and raised again in three days, it is no building. Rather, as the evangelist tells us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, **"He was speaking about the temple of His body"** (Jn 2:21). And the evangelist goes on to tell us that **"When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this."** Just as they are told not to tell anyone what they saw on the mountain until after the Son of the Man is raised from the dead.

What we behold today with Peter, James, and John is the Lord who is Himself the place where God dwells with us. Jesus, His body, His flesh and blood, is the temple. . There is the fixed, constant, immovable place where we see God with us, dwelling with us. There, in His body is where we see God for us. His body is the place of sacrifice, the shedding of blood – His blood – for our life. The forgiveness of sins, salvation, life with God is written in His blood. Let there be no doubt about it in your heart, mind, or soul. The one whom we see go to the cross as the sacrifice for sin is the divine Son who stands today on the Mountain in all His glory. Here you see who it is who goes on to die. It is the divine Son of God. That, it so happens, is what Luke tells us in his account of this event. He tells us that Moses and Elijah who appeared with Jesus in glory **"spoke of His departure,"** literally, His exodus, **"which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem"** (Lk 9:31).

You are discussed in the Bible. It is Jesus' exodus, His death for sinners, your redemption, that is the topic of conversation in that moment. And so with Peter, James, and John we are lifted up from our terror by the Lord who stoops down to us. We raise our eyes and we behold Him and Him alone. We behold Him in faith, lifted up on the cross, the one, perfect, all-availing sacrifice for our sins. There we see how it is that God dwells with man. We behold Him with our eyes, the shining glory of His body and blood veiled in bread and wine. Here is the place, not where the bloody sacrifice is offered, but where its fruits, its benefits, are received. Here is where God still dwells with humanity in His humanity.

Lord, it is good that we are here!

How lovely is Your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!