

**Pentecost +12**  
**27/08/2006**

**Mark the Evangelist**

**I Kings 8:22-30, 41-43**  
**Psalm 84**  
**Ephesians 6:10-20**  
**John 6:56-69**

**My name shall be there...**

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*How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord God of hosts.* In this way did pilgrims praise God as they travelled to the Temple in Jerusalem. Worship was central to the faith of the people of God but there was not always a Temple in which to offer praise. The Ark of the Covenant, a box which contained the tablets with the 10 commandments, was a portable sign of God's presence. It travelled with the people for many years and was housed in a tent. The Ark was a tangible sign of God's promise to journey with them in life. But eventually the people settled down and Solomon built a permanent home for the Ark. The first reading, which is an extract from Solomon's prayer of dedication of the Temple suggests a theology of God which is still of interest.

The God who promised to be with the people cannot be contained in highest heaven, or deepest earth, much less a grand house such as Solomon has built. This is another way of saying God cannot be framed by human minds, or contained by works of human hands. To put it more directly: the flesh counts for nothing. God cannot be captured by us, nor can we discover God on our own resources. The wonder is that God allows the divine presence to be available in the world. In connection with the Temple, God said "my name shall be there." The Holy name is allowed to "rest" on the Temple, and in John the day comes when God is not worshipped in a Temple, but in the Spirit and truth of the One who comes.

Everything we know about the divine name is consistent with this. The Holy God has a name which is untranslatable and unspeakable. While God has a name amongst all the names of earth, God maintains his own discretion. God is known, but remains beyond our grasp.

*How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord God of hosts.* Psalm 84 appears to be a song about a place, but in reality it is a poem in praise of the communion the people enjoyed with God. Deep and comprehensive is the sense of joy amongst the pilgrims as they come in sight of Jerusalem. *Heart and flesh* sing together and the very thought of being in God's presence infuses them with a deep sense of well-being. But it goes further. Their journey, a product of their communion with God, heals and enriches the world. The valley of Baca, a bitter valley, becomes a place of springs. There is a sense of the renewal of the face of the earth, and even co-operation with the natural elements as the early rains make the valley a place of pools. The relationship between the pilgrims and their worship of God is positive for the world. The sparrow finds a place for her young near the altars of the Lord. God's covenant makes room for the most menial of creatures. This thought is connected to Solomon's prayer that God will look even on foreigners when they come to pray at the Temple. The grace of God is understood as inclusive to the utmost extent, a thought which is directly relevant as we observe Refugee and Migrant Sunday. When God allows the divine name to "rest" on the

Temple this is not for exclusive purposes, nor for providing a way of dividing the world into them and us. This is a gracious gesture, given for the sake of the world in all its aspects. It is intended to be a means for establishing a generous, healing, community life which flows from worship.

*Join all the glorious names of wisdom love and power.* Our opening hymn shows how complex it is to try and show all the facets of God that have emerged in the history of the Judaeo-Christian relationship. Each one of these verses uses a different name to praise God for something that has been done for us. This takes us to the core of what worship is: honouring God, praising God's name for the many ways in which we have been given life and freedom. The name of God is connected with the name of Jesus, and yet as we see in the Gospel today, this is a problem. There is mounting dissatisfaction and disgust over Jesus' claim of divine status, and his talk about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Jesus' meaning is: life that is grounded in God the living God is to be found, not in a Temple made with hands, but in communion with him. Those who wish to be part of that relationship, are called to follow his path of self-giving that led to the Cross. His name and his style of life was the unpalatable link for many who gave up and went away. There are many today who do not find themselves drawn by Jesus. Perhaps the way the church presents him can so often be forgetful of the openness to foreigners, the room for the menial creatures and the joy of sharing God's inclusive grace in worship.

After the others left Jesus asked the 12: **Do you also wish to go away?** The response is revealing. **To whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.** The 12 have been in the same crowd as the others; they have listened to the same teaching and witnessed the same signs. But they confess that in company with him they found their souls were nourished and their spirits refreshed. John suggests it was not a matter better human perception or higher intelligence quotas. This was a gift of the Spirit that came despite their doubts and reservations.

What is the eternal life that is in him? We customarily hear the word eternal as having a forever sense. This is not wrong, but that is not all there is. The life Jesus brings is life as we know it, but with a special plenitude and intensity - a fullness or abundance - that extends beyond ourselves to include all our concerns. It is life in which we know freedom from servitude, as did the people of old. How we need this in the age of terror and as we are driven about by the forces of globalization and the free market. It is life in which we know home, in the deepest sense of that word. On Refugee and Migrant Sunday, we keep a special place in our heart for all those who have suffered from dislocation and fragmentation, and we do all that we can to offer home to them. And it is life in which we experience the full acceptance of ourselves as we are. The key text in John might well be said to be John 3:16, which tells us that God looked on the whole world, in love, and gave his Son, in order that it might have fullness is life. That is the gift that we celebrate here, in word and deed.

Jesus said: unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you. I had dinner with a good friend whom I have known for many years but have not been able to see for a while. We both enjoy food and wine, and a jolly good talk. At one stage of the meal I was suddenly aware of what really good friends we are, and how the many years have built a deep and special connection that has nourished us both. I felt nurtured by the time together. It is true that my friend and I ate food, and drank wine

together, but we did something else as well. We engaged in our relationship. We added to the commonwealth of understanding between us - the love and care we have shared for so long.

The promise of John is that engagement with Jesus, present in his church, through word, sacrament and community, will bring life that is more than this.