

## Twenty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time

I would like to begin these reflections by looking at who we are, and to do so by listening to Jesus' words at the Last Supper. Having just promised to send his disciples the Spirit to dwell with them and in them (John 14:17), he adds: 'If you love me you will keep my word, and my Father will love you, and we will come to you and make our home in you'(John 14:23). Of each one of us it can be said that our soul is a temple in which God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, loves to dwell. Of course, since God is love, God will come to us only when invited. As Jesus says in the Book of Revelation: 'I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me'(Apocalypse 3:20). Reflecting on this wonderful mystery, Paul writes to the community in Corinth: 'Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you?'(1Corinthians 3:16)

Throughout the 40 years of their journeying through the Sinai desert the people of Israel lived in tents. They knew that God was journeying with them, and so they had a special tent or as we often say a 'tabernacle' which they set aside for God. They were very conscious of their own broken, sinful lives and so they made sure that God's tabernacle, God's tent, was pitched *outside* the camp. Moses would speak with God there, but the ordinary people did not dare to come close to God's dwelling.

The Incarnation changed all this. In the prologue to his gospel, John, the beloved disciple, gives expression to his wonder and delight when he recalls that the Word of God 'pitched his tent *among* us'. In his First Letter he gives lyrical expression to what it meant to him and to his contemporaries to see Jesus, to listen to the words that came from his heart, and to touch him with his own hands and experience the warmth of Jesus' embrace. The beautiful homely intimacy became a real, everyday event in the lives of those who were privileged to know Jesus. It continues in the lives of his disciples. Our bodies, consecrated in baptism, are his favourite tent or tabernacle as he journeys with us, day and night. He comes to us in a special way here in the Eucharist, and the tabernacle here in the Church reminds us that he is here in the midst of the community, dwelling with us.

When I was a child we were encouraged to pop in to the Church and visit Jesus truly present in the tabernacle. Many of you will remember this in your own childhood. If we find ourselves too busy to do this, and if we are not handing on this practice to our children, we would do well to examine the rest of our lives. Perhaps we are also too busy to enter our own hearts to be with him there.

My first point, then, is to remind you, as I remind myself, of the importance of entering our own heart. We have just celebrated the feasts of Saint Monica and of her son, Augustine. In spite of all the prayers of his saintly mother it was not till he was in his mid-thirties that he came to see the importance of what James calls in today's Second Reading 'true unspoilt religion'. The word 'religion' means that which binds everything together. Augustine came to see God as the bond that holds the whole of creation together and the one who has the most intimate bond with him. He came to realise that what he, Augustine, really longed for was communion with God. In his account of his spiritual journey (the '*Confessions*') he writes: 'Late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new; Late have I loved you! For you were within me and I outside; and I sought you outside and in my ugliness I fell upon the lovely things you have made. You were with me

but I was not with you. I was kept from you by those things, yet had they not been in you, they would not have been at all. You called and cried to me and broke open my deafness. You sent forth your beams and shone upon me and chased away my blindness. You breathed fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and now pant for you. I tasted you and now hunger and thirst for you. You touched me and I have burned for your peace ... Once I am united to you with all my being, there will be no more grief or toil and my life will be fully alive, filled with you. You raise up the one you fill. It is because I am not yet filled with you that I am a burden to myself' (X.27-28).

From his own experience he has this advice for others: 'Return to the heart! Why are you running away from yourselves? Why are you getting lost, outside yourselves, entering on deserted ways? You are wandering aimlessly. Come back! To where? To the Lord! It can be done without delay! Return immediately to your heart! Exiled from your own self you wander outside. You fail to know yourself, you who want to know the source of your existence. Come back! Return to the heart ... See there what you can learn about God, for the image of God is there. In your heart dwells Christ. In your heart you are being renewed after God's image'(Tract on John 18.10.1).

A second point is also important. When we get in touch with our heart we find that not everything in our heart is pure. Jesus makes this point very clearly in the Gospel when he warns us: 'It is from within, from your heart, that evil intentions emerge'(Mark 7:22). This is one of the mysterious realities that we include under the idea of 'Original Sin'. Not only are we influenced to evil by our social environment; we are also influenced by hereditary factors. We are born innocent and pure, but we are also exposed to sin and have inherited tendencies to sin. Getting in touch with our heart can sometimes be a painful process of acquiring humiliating self-knowledge. But here again it is the mystery of the indwelling of God that is our hope. God dwells in our hearts and it is God's love that alone can purify it. God will purify our hearts if we let him. So it is that James warns us: 'Accept and submit to the word which has been planted in you and can save your souls. But you must do what the word tells you and not just listen to it and deceive yourselves.' (James 1:21-22).

We hunger and thirst for many things. In today's liturgy the church invites us to attend to the hunger of our souls and to remember that we are never alone. If we so desire, all we have to do is open our souls and Jesus will come, with his Father and the Spirit of love that binds them to each other. God wants us to be part of the divine communion celebrated by the whole of the cosmos. If we belong to God, we belong to each other. Indeed, the whole world is ours.