

## 12th Sunday of the Year, Year C

The psalm chosen for today's liturgy is one of the most beautiful prayers of the whole Psalter. The opening stanza picks up something of the weariness of life. We have such deep longings but nothing seems able to satisfy them. The psalmist looks to God for the love and the life for which he yearns: 'O God, you are my God, for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting. My body pines for you like a dry, weary land without water'(Psalm 63:1). We are reminded of the words of Isaiah: 'You who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come ... the wine and milk here is free. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread? Why do you spend your time working for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant'(Isaiah 55:1-3).

We find the same theme in the New Testament. Jesus knew that our deepest hunger and thirst is for God and so he tried to draw us away from the distractions that blunt our desire without fulfilling it. He even tried to draw people away from finding false security in a religious system that likewise failed to satisfy them. Today's psalm uses the image of land that is parched and 'weary' through lack of nourishing rain. Using the same word, Jesus says: 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light'(Matthew 11:28-30).

On another occasion, when people were streaming into the temple building, hoping to quench the thirst of their souls there, Jesus cried out: 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to **me**, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water."'(John 7:37-38)

Saint Augustine expressed our experience well when he wrote at the beginning of his Confessions: 'You have made us for yourself, O God, and our heart is restless till it rest in you'. Commenting on the words of Isaiah 'Return, O sinner, to the heart', he wrote: '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! Where to? 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'.

Augustine invites us to go to our own heart, for, as he goes on to explain, that is where God dwells; that is where we find Jesus, the one who calls us and promises to satisfy the desires of our heart. The author of today's psalm goes to the temple to see God's glory and to experience God's love which is 'better than life'. The climax of the experience comes when he joins his brothers and sisters in sharing the communion banquet. God's

presence among his people is symbolised by the wings of the cherubim shading God's throne in the inner sanctuary of the temple. The psalmist feels safe, experiencing communion with God under the shade of these outstretched wings.

There is a marvellous scene in the Book of Exodus in which Moses expresses his desire to see God: 'Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.' And the Lord continued, 'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.'

Our author does not go to a cleft in the rock. He goes to the temple, just as we have come to Church this morning - to join the community and to experience communion with God. For we believe that we see the glory of God when we look upon Jesus. As Saint John says in the Prologue to his Gospel: 'We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth'(John 1:14). This same point is made by Jesus himself at the end of his final prayer at the Last Supper: 'Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory'(John 17:24).

John insists that we see the glory of God (by which he means the radiant beauty of God's love) when we contemplate Jesus on the cross and 'look upon the one we have pierced'(John 19:37 - see today's first reading). That is why when, as disciples of Jesus, we come here to experience God, we make present again his life-giving action on the cross, and we receive communion from his pierced heart. We confess our sins that hurt him so, but we allow his forgiveness and love to flow over us. We believe that the thirst that our souls experience for him is but a response of the thirst which his soul experiences for us. Our longing to receive him is itself inspired by his longing to give himself to us.

Today's psalm ends with the words: 'My soul clings to you; your right hand holds me fast'.

Paul speaks about our 'holding fast' to Jesus and becoming one spirit with him (1Corinthians 6:17). He cannot hold back his delight when he tells us that nothing can separate us from God's love as we experience it in Jesus (Romans 8:35-39). In baptism each of us was bound to Jesus. We may be unfaithful but he will remain faithful to the commitment shared on that occasion. So let us cling to him and feel the strength of his arm supporting us.

Finally, today's gospel holds a warning for us. If we think we can satisfy our own hunger and thirst for ourselves we will experience profound disappointment, for we will be left

like a dry weary land without water. Here, gathered with our Christian brothers and sisters in God's church, we have the banquet that strengthens and refreshes our souls. Let us thank him with all our hearts for the grace with which he attracts us here and for the gift of himself that always awaits us.

When we receive communion today, Jesus looks into our hearts and asks: 'Who do you say I am?' Let our gratitude and our commitment to his mission of love be our response.