

2nd Sunday after Christmas (A)  
(Sirach 24:1-4, 8-12 / John 1:1-18)  
05.01.2020

God pitched his tent among his people

Dear brothers and sisters,

In both readings we have just heard, it is said that God “pitched his tent” among his people. In the first reading, from the Book of Ecclesiasticus, it is the Wisdom of God who is invited by God to pitch his tent among his people Israel. In John’s gospel, it is the Word of God who was made flesh and lived among us, literally: pitched his tent among us. At Christmas, in Jesus, the Wisdom of God or the Word of God, that is to say God himself – our multifaceted God – took flesh and came to live among us. In Jesus, the Risen Lord, God is still living among us today.

“He pitched his tent”. The image of the tent is interesting. It implies mobility. There is no question of a palace, a temple or a church – that is to say a well delimited place – where we would be obliged to go in order to meet with God. On the contrary the image of the tent implies that it is the Lord who accompanies us in every situation of our lives. When we rejoice and are blest, the Lord is with us, He rejoices with us. When we are sad, depressed or grieving, the Lord is with us. He is beside us as one who is compassionate, that is to say loving and suffering with us. God’s love for us is strong but it is always discreet. It is always something proposed to us; it is never imposed upon us. We have to welcome it. We believe that, at the end, the Lord’s love will transform our sorrow into joy.

Wherever we are, whatever our life situation may be, whatever state we find ourselves in, the Lord is with us. If we are persecuted for our faith in Christ, if we are obliged to flee our homeland and seek asylum elsewhere, if a significant relationship of our life is damaged or broken, if we are gravely ill, if we are grieving a loved one who died precociously, very quickly, or even suddenly, perhaps even having taken his own life, if something impossible is asked of us, if we are the innocent victim of a grave injustice... in all these situations and so many more, the Lord is with us. We are not alone. The Lord is there to help us carry our cross. Let us hold faith in the unceasing loving and saving presence of the Lord in our hearts.

We believe that the Lord is always with us. We must ask ourselves: ‘Are we with Him?’ This is an important question, one we have to pose to ourselves. Do we acknowledge the Lord’s presence by our side, His presence within us? Do we take time to welcome his presence in prayer? Do we take time to listen to him by meditating upon the Scriptures in order to receive his love, to welcome his word of life through which he reveals his will to us and enlightens our path? The Lord’s Word is a lamp for our path. His word is the light which helps us to see the full picture of all the many situations in which we are involved, and to see the full dimension of all the persons with whom we live and share our lives. Do we consent to becoming his children whom he loves, cares for and consoles, especially in times of trial.

We who live in Ireland should not forget the ancient Christian Celtic spirituality which had a prayer for almost every ordinary activity of the day. In this way our ancestors in the faith acknowledged the continual presence of the Lord in their lives.

On rising from bed they would say: "I rise with God, may God rise with me. The hand of God be about me in my waking and my sleeping and in my rising up".

Their morning offering was: "O My God, I offer you all I think or do or say. Keep me free from harm this day".

Our ancestors had prayers for use before starting their work and during work; while baking bread and at the end of work; before going on a journey, on the way to Mass, before entering a church, while putting out the light, before going to sleep and even for a happy death.

Our ancestors knew with a real depth of faith that God was with them, through Jesus, the Word made flesh, in every moment of their lives.

They knew that every action they performed and every word they spoke could become prayer if it was said and was done in the conscious awareness of the presence of Jesus in their life.

What was possible for our ancestors is possible for us also today if only we consent to believe that we are never alone, that God never abandons us, that God walks with us always on the path of life, gently leading us on the path towards his kingdom.

Christmas invites us to become more and more aware that The Lord is with us, really present to us, at each step of our ordinary lives: when we arise each morning, when we greet with a smile someone who crosses our path, when we speak a word or do something (be it cooking, washing, ironing, cleaning), when we make a phone call, send an email, answer the doorbell, prepare a cup of tea, do the shopping, call in on a neighbour, bless the person who cuts across us in traffic. All these actions of our ordinary lives can become moments of awareness of the continual presence of Jesus by our side, moments of communion with Jesus. What could be just an ordinary and boring life can become for us an extraordinary life, a life with God, a life with a dimension of eternity to it.

Let us give thanks to the Lord for having pitched his tent among us. May we pitch our own tent in his uninterrupted loving presence! This is the grace of Christmas which is offered to us. Let us welcome it and live in it!