

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Sep 28th 2013

“Sing and rejoice, I am coming to dwell among you, says the Lord!”

As I ponder those words of assurance, I think about what I can do differently to make my dwelling place more hospitable to the Lord. My home is filled with material artifacts that reveal to others that I am a person of faith. I have a collection of all those old framed parlor prints of Christ that people hung in their homes 50 and 100 years ago. You have all seen them. There is the one of Jesus as the shepherd, holding a lamb in one arm and a staff in the other. My favorite is the one of Jesus praying in dark Gethsemane, a copy of which always hung in our family living room. My grandparents had one of the boy Jesus in the temple and a print of the famous Last Supper painting. I also have the one you see often in church rectories or even above altars in some northern European ethnic group Protestant churches, the portrait of the Anglo featured gentle and serene Jesus. While I have all of my prints hanging in my bedroom, I rarely see them in anyone's homes anymore. This seems to have gone out of style. There is also a Bible on the bed stand and a small wooden cross hanging by the door. And I confess I also have angel artifacts everywhere in the garden and a pergola framed by old Gothic church windows. About the only thing I don't have is a Madonna statue shrine in an old cast iron bathtub standing on end in the center of a flower bed. If you are from the Midwest, you will remember them.

But does the presence of this “stuff” that I find beautiful and comforting in my home mean that the Lord dwells with me? I don't think so. I think it means that I believe in a God that dwells with me, but I am not so sure that it means others feel the presence of God when they are in my home. Evidence of that presence would be going another step further. I was told by Fr. Larry Gillick, one of the Jesuits here at Creighton, that when we truly recognize God in our lives, we will not only be thankful, but we will be grateful. So I have been thinking about how can my home demonstrate gratitude for God's presence, and not just be a statement of my faith. How can people see that I am grateful for God's presence in my home? Creating a small space where I can pray has been my response to that question. For me, that space is my dining room, a room that seldom gets cluttered. It is the prettiest room in my house. In fact, many of the other rooms in the house are under renovation and it really is quite a disaster in many ways. But the dining room is sacred to me. It has lovely antique walnut furniture, an old rug with roses on it, lace curtains, and lots of plants. On top of the buffet are scented candles and vases for flowers. There is stained glass in one of the windows. It is clear to anyone who enters there that I pray before meals. This is one way I show my gratitude. It is an old habit. But sometimes people see the habit of giving thanks for meals as just evidence of faith and nothing more.

That is why I am really thinking about what Fr. Gillick means when he says gratitude is not enough. There is another step. It is generosity. If the Lord dwells with me, I have many blessings, and if I have many blessings, I need to share them. A faithful person is not just thankful and grateful, a faithful person is generous. If the Lord dwells in my home, especially in my dining room, it seems more and more to me that the Lord would expect guests there. So I am thinking that my dining room could be more than a place where I can pray, but also a place where people can come to experience the Lord's blessings, where they can be happy and where they can be consoled in their sorrows. So I need to be

more purposeful in my hospitality to my home. In addition to inviting friends to share good company and a good meal, I need to be more intentional about inviting people to share the happiness and healing experiences of the Lord in their midst. And I need to do that more often, more generously!

So today I pray that we can all see our dwellings as something more than just a place where we pay the bills and conduct the business of life, such as eating and resting, but the place where the Lord dwells with us. May we all know that the Lord dwells among us when we return to our homes today.

I pray that we can all see our homes, regardless of their material conditions, as places where we can host generous celebrations of the Lord in our midst as a way of sharing blessings with others.

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