

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Mar 15th 2013

All of us experience times when we speak with another person or persons to explain something and no matter how hard we try, they fail to get the point we are trying to make. I can think of times during my youth when I had that experience with my younger siblings. And of course I thought that the problem was theirs. How could they not see what was so clear to me? Our Lord had that kind of a problem with the Pharisees, and today's gospel reading is a good example of it. We hear today from St. John as we do so often during the closing weeks of Lent. I think of St. John as the evangelist of the Judean visits of Jesus during his public life here on earth. He chronicles well the trips that Jesus made to Judea and reveals incidents on those trips that the other evangelists do not.

St. John begins by telling us that Jesus had been spending his time in Galilee and avoiding Judea. He knew from his previous visits there that the Pharisees and some of the leaders of the people were trying to kill him. But now the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was approaching. The feast of Tabernacles was one of the three major feasts of the Jews. Many Jews came from all over the land of Israel and from other countries on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feast. So it presented a great opportunity for Jesus to preach to Jews who had not yet heard his message. But there was the difficulty of going to Jerusalem because of the threats against Jesus. Apparently some relatives of Jesus had formed a pilgrimage and asked him to accompany them. Jesus declined, but after they had left, he changed his mind.

He, probably accompanied by the apostles, went up to the feast secretly. The secrecy is easy to understand in light of the threats against Jesus. But what happens next is not so easy to understand. When they arrive in Judea Jesus goes right to the great temple in Jerusalem and begins to teach the large crowd that had gathered there. He does away with secrecy and seems to throw caution to the winds.

How do we explain first the secrecy and then the lack of it? I think that the explanation lies in the fact that our ways are not God's ways. God wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to preach to and teach the large crowd gathered in Jerusalem for the feast. But as we hear at the end of this reading: "no one laid a hand upon him because his hour had not yet come."

Jesus was right to be cautious and avoid going to Jerusalem, but when a great opportunity arose to spread his message to the crowd at the feast, Jesus took it. He avoided harm because according to God's plan he still had more work to do here on earth before his passion and death.

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