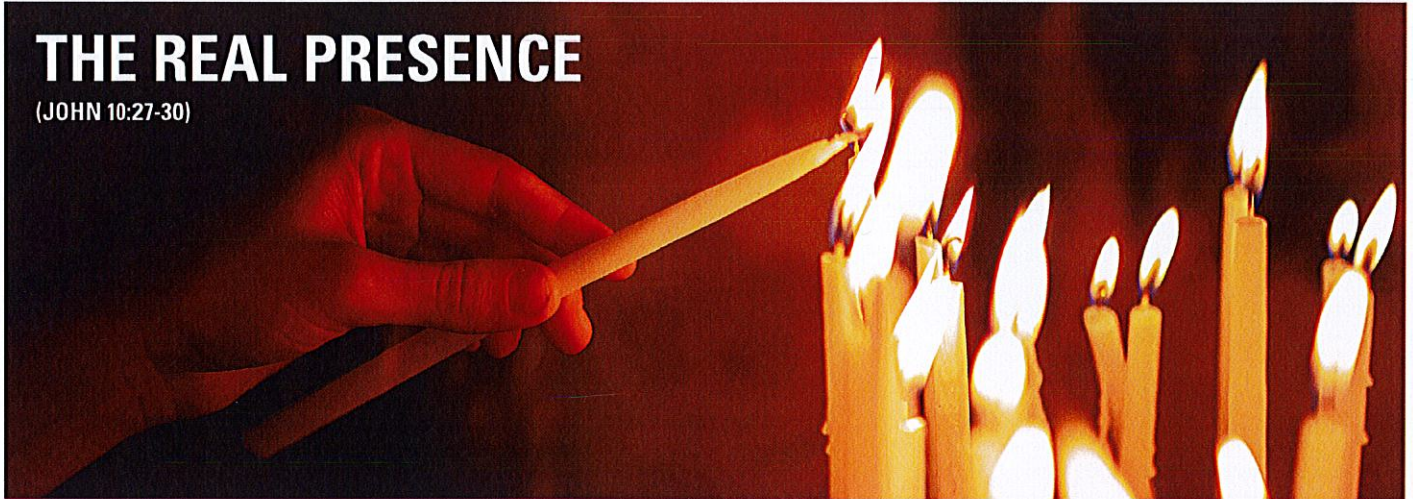


THE REAL PRESENCE

(JOHN 10:27-30)



Today's Gospel extract comes from a discussion between Jesus and his opponents during the winter festival of the Feast of Dedication, and is set within the Temple in Jerusalem.

The others have demanded that Jesus tell them plainly whether he is the Messiah or not. Jesus replies by giving them a description of the true believer, the kind of person who can accept Jesus' message because, unlike the people he is talking to, that individual will accept Jesus on his own terms. The others cannot receive him because their understanding is limited to their own ideas.

The true believer, one of the "sheep" Jesus is talking about, hears (and listens), follows (becomes a disciple) and thus receives eternal life, which means never being lost.

The Feast of Dedication celebrates the reconsecration of the Temple and its altar after it had been desecrated by pagan soldiers, and the building represented the presence of God among the people. Jesus, however, says, "The Father and I are one." We remember that elsewhere Jesus tells his disciple Philip that to see Jesus is to see the Father. There is now a different way to understand how God is present, not in a building, no matter how sacred, but rather in the person of Jesus. To believe in Jesus will then bring the disciple close not only to Jesus, but also to God. In this way, Jesus is, in himself, replacing the Temple as the focus of God's presence. ■

REFLECT

We are accustomed to talking and hearing about the "Real Presence": this expression normally refers to the reserved Eucharistic sacrament, which is kept in the tabernacle in the church. This phrase states our belief that Jesus is truly present in the consecrated bread and wine. However, it may give the impression that this is the only way in which Jesus is here among us.

One of the reforms of the liturgy at Vatican II was to recommend the removal of the tabernacle from the high altar to a side chapel. Some people took this as a lack of respect for the Blessed Sacrament, but the directive was making an important point. When the community assembles to celebrate the Eucharist together, Christ is present in the congregation in as valid a way as in the consecrated bread and wine. Hence there should be no genuflection to the tabernacle, as Christ is present among his disciples, in just as real, though different, a way. Jesus tells us that where two or three gather in his name, he is "in their midst".

Christ is present in other ways, for instance, when we pray, when we read the Scriptures, when we minister to our brothers and sisters. Jesus tells us that he and the Father are one, and so God's presence is mediated to the disciple through him. In this way, Jesus himself is the Real Presence, and he and God are not confined to any building or ritual. ■

SAY

The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice.

(John 10:27)

DO

Light a candle and spend some time thinking about how God is present to you in the person of the risen Jesus.



LEARN

The Feast of Dedication celebrated the reconsecration of the Temple and its altar after it had been desecrated in the century before Jesus.

It is commemorated today in the Jewish festival of Hanukkah.

The Temple was regarded as the place of privileged access to the presence of God.

In John's Gospel, Jesus replaces in himself the principal feasts and institutions of Israel.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

The merciful love of the Lord fills the earth;
by the word of the Lord the heavens were
made, alleluia.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

Almighty ever-living God,
lead us to a share in the joys of heaven,
so that the humble flock may reach
where the brave Shepherd has gone before.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Acts 13:14, 43-52

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Paul and Barnabas carried on from Perga till they reached Antioch in Pisidia. Here they went to the synagogue on the sabbath and took their seats.

When the meeting broke up, many Jews and devout converts joined Paul and Barnabas, and in their talks with them Paul and Barnabas urged them to remain faithful to the grace God had given them.

The next sabbath almost the whole town assembled to hear the word of God. When they saw the crowds, the Jews, prompted by jealousy, used blasphemies and contradicted everything Paul said. Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, "We had to proclaim the word of God to you first, but since you have rejected it, since you do not think yourselves worthy of eternal life, we must turn to the pagans. For this is what the Lord commanded us to do when he said:

"I have made you a light for the nations,
so that my salvation may reach the ends
of the earth."

It made the pagans very happy to hear this and they thanked the Lord for his message; all who were destined for eternal life became believers. Thus the word of the Lord spread through the whole countryside.

But the Jews worked upon some of the devout women of the upper classes and the leading men of the city and persuaded them to turn against Paul and Barnabas and expel them from their territory. So they shook the

dust from their feet in defiance and went off to Iconium; but the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalms 99

Response:

We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

or

Alleluia!

1. Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Serve the Lord with gladness.
Come before him, singing for joy. (R.)
2. Know that he, the Lord, is God.
He made us, we belong to him,
we are his people, the sheep of his flock. (R.)
3. Indeed, how good is the Lord,
eternal his merciful love.
He is faithful from age to age. (R.)

SECOND READINGApocalypse
7:9, 14-17

A reading from the book of the Apocalypse.

I, John, saw a huge number, impossible to count, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language; they were standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hands. One of the elders said to me, "These are the people who have been through the great persecution, and because they have washed their robes white again, in the blood of the Lamb, they now stand in front of God's throne and serve him day and night in his sanctuary; and the One who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. They will never hunger or thirst again; neither the sun nor scorching wind will ever plague them, because the Lamb who is at the throne will be their shepherd and will lead them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes."

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

I am the good shepherd, says the Lord;
I know my own sheep and my own know me.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

John 10:27-30

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

Jesus said:

"The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice;
I know them and they follow me.
I give them eternal life; they will never be lost
and no one will ever steal them from me.
The Father who gave them to me is greater than anyone,
and no one can steal from the Father.
The Father and I are one."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Grant, we pray, O Lord,
that we may always find delight in these
paschal mysteries,
so that the renewal constantly at work within
us
may be the cause of our unending joy.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

The Good Shepherd has risen,
who laid down his life for his sheep
and willingly died for his flock, alleluia.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Look upon your flock, kind Shepherd,
and be pleased to settle in eternal pastures
the sheep you have redeemed
by the Precious Blood of your Son.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

Without Easter, Good Friday would have no meaning. Without Easter, there would be no hope that suffering and abandonment might be tolerable. But with Easter, a way out becomes visible for human sorrows, an absolute future: more than a hope, a divine expectation.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar