

6th Sunday of Easter (A)
(Acts 8:5-8.14-17 / John 14:15-21)
25.05.2014

Where is your God?

Where is God? Where is God for us?

These questions are not purely academic... Ever since God asked Adam and Eve: "Where are you?" (Gn 3:9), men, women, and children have never stopped wondering if God is really present to them. People who have asked these questions were not all pagans. The psalmist himself cried out: "Why, O Lord, do you stand afar off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" (10:1)

The first answer to this question is that God is radically above everything he has created. None of us can catch hold God. His otherness is beyond our grasp and our reach. The first believers were very aware of the gap which separated them from God. King Solomon wondered: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain him." (1Kings 8:27)

And yet today in our Gospel reading, Jesus declares that the Spirit and himself are going to dwell in us. In Jesus Christ, God indeed dwells within each one us. As we sing in one hymn of our repertoire: "He whom nothing can contain / No one can compel / Bound his timeless Godhead here / In our time to dwell" (*God who made...*). For his part St Augustine exclaims: "My God, you were more intimately present to me than my innermost being" (*Conf. III,6,11*)

In this respect we have to be very careful because sometimes when we speak about prayer or about our faith, we can give the impression that we believe in a God who is only remotely connected to us; a God who is lost in the heavens, far removed from our world and our concerns. The immediate consequence of such a perspective is that we encourage people to spend their time and energy trying to attract God's attention, or, on the contrary, we allow people to think that they can leave God to dwell on high, while they strive to live their lives without him here on earth.

The fact that God has chosen to dwell within you and me should radically change the way we relate to him, to one another and to all other people.

If the whole Christian journey is about connecting in truth with God, with one self and with others, then how can we expect to connect with God who is within us if we are not first with ourselves?

St Augustine experienced in his own life the dilemma which tears us all apart and he describes it as follows: "Lo, you were within, but I outside, seeking there for you (...). You were with me, but I was not with you" (*Conf. X,27,38*). Elsewhere he warns us: "Do not go outside, come back into yourself. It is in the inner self that truth dwells" (*True Religion, 39:72*). If we are, as St Paul writes, "the temple of the living God" (2Co 6:16), then the first place of meeting with God is within us, in our heart.

It is important not to be misguided, this return to the heart is not just a self-seeking process for a balanced life, a kind of supposedly evangelised self-centredness.

The awareness of God's presence in my heart should affect all my relationships. If I am the temple of God, you and all my brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world are God's temples as well. And here we need to be clear about what we mean when we speak of "brothers and sisters in Christ": we are including all men and women, not only those who

worship like us, those who belong to our denomination, those who vote like us, those who are culturally and socially one of us, those who agree with us, those whose external behaviour is always conformed to the standards of society. None of us becomes the temple of God by his or her own achievements, by his or her own efforts. It is God who is the architect and the master builder of the temple, Christ is the cornerstone and the Spirit builds us up. The challenge for us is to allow God to accomplish his work within all of us.

The problem is, as St Paul reminds us (Cf. 1Co 3:17), that we have the power to destroy the temple of God.

We know that in many ways we can work against Life in our own lives and in the lives of others. The temple that we are may be in need of repair and of cleansing. For many reasons, which are not all the result of our own decisions, our lives may be in ruins and yet the message we hear once again this morning is that because God dwells within us we are still and forever sacred spaces and consecrated ground.

In these sacred spaces, in our lives and in the lives of all men and women, we are commissioned to become ministers of encouragement, of hope, of challenge and comfort. The holy priesthood that we are all called to exercise, by virtue of our baptism, is to serve God in one another, it is to take care of the temples God is edifying within us with grace and love. Following in St Paul's footsteps, we must never forget that the Lord has given us authority "for building up and not for tearing down" (2Co 13:10).

Too often, we take our brothers and sisters for granted, we live among men and women without really paying attention to them, we bump into one another and we just say what is expected from us and do what should be done while God is there waiting for us, longing to connect with us, desiring to share something of his love with us.

In our families and communities, in our daily meetings, the world would be a little bit different if we were ready and willing to see God where he is: within ourselves and in all those whom we meet. Each time we step across the threshold of a human life, may we do so with the same respect and the same attention which we would have if we were entering the temple of God.

When a brother or a sister allows us to enter into his or her life, like Jacob, may we marvel and say: "Surely the Lord is in this place (...). This is none other than the house of God" (Gn 28:16-17).