

Spirituality of God's Temple in us *by Fr. Carlo Colonna s.j.*

Every Christian is deeply concerned by the spirituality of God's Temple. This spirituality is grounded in three fundamental realities of our faith, which are, so to speak, our spiritual DNA. We all have them and they are: our being the living stones of the same Temple of God, Christ; our being empowered with the dignity and the function of holy priests in God's Temple, all of us together as one with the high priest, Jesus Christ; our different ways of worshiping the Father in spirit and truth, as priests in Christ. Let us take a closer look at each one of these three realities that found the spirituality of God's Temple, which we are.

God's Temple in the Old Testament

Let us focus on the Old and the New Testaments, and let us notice the amazing change brought by the coming of Jesus, God's Messiah, to the relationship between God and his people. The term "Testament" implies two elements: on the one side, we have God's attitude toward us, as He establishes what will be the pivotal point of his covenant with us; and on the other side, we are shown how He wants us to live out the relationship with Him.

At the very beginning we see God establishing a covenant with his people Israel. Israel is chosen among all the other nations on the earth. God binds her through Abraham by blessing him with a son after opening Sarah's otherwise barren womb. God then frees his people from slavery in Egypt, by the hand of Moses, and leads them to the Promised Land. During David's time, God orders Solomon, David's son, to build a magnificent Temple in Jerusalem, where he could dwell in splendor and glory. God's personal dwelling in the Temple was known to the Hebrews as: "God's Name is dwelling in the Temple," meaning that the Temple was dedicated and consecrated to the Name of the God of Israel, to his Person. Inside the Temple there was a special place where God's Presence was actually "concentrated". It was the holiest spot of the entire Temple, chosen by God Himself as His, and which some of us would know as the "Sancta Sanctorum."

However, the entire Temple was consecrated to God and filled with his holiness. This indicated that God, the Most High, was dwelling with his people, surrounding them with his glory.

It is important for us to keep these dispositions in mind, because God's following revelation through Christ will not abolish them but, on the contrary, it

will fulfill them in a totally new and unexpected way. By the same token, all the other dispositions concerning the building of the Temple in Jerusalem and its practices will not disappear but they will be amazingly accomplished in Jesus Christ. We will come back to this, as it turns out to be very useful for the spirituality of God's Temple in us.

In the Old Testament writings we read about God and his chosen people. Then we start reading about another reality, namely, the Temple, God's dwelling place. However, we never see written that God's people is his Temple; we read that God is dwelling in the midst of his people, yes, but there is always a distinction between them and God's Temple.

The New Testament's amazing change

The amazing newness of God's disposition in the New Testament concerns the fact that the humanity of Jesus is now God's Temple. It is in Him that God dwells in the midst of our humanity. This stunning Good News is given by Jesus himself, when the guardians of the Temple of Jerusalem questioned his authority as he rose against the merchants. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up » (John 2:19-21). Jesus was referring to his resurrected Body, permanent dwelling of God in the midst of our humanity. His resurrected Body is a glorious temple, filled with splendor, immortal, untarnished, forever lasting. Likewise, the person of Jesus as a man born from Mary and as he who has died on the cross is also God's temple. On the day of his resurrection, however, Jesus' body would undergo a glorious and everlasting transformation.

This reality of our faith is very important for the spirituality of God's Temple. It is our founding stone. Christ is the foundation of all that is built upon him. He is also the foundation of the spirituality of God's Temple in force of his humanity, body and soul together. He is the new Temple where God dwells in the midst of us, human beings.

Three fundamental realities for the spirituality of God's Temple in us.

There are two other realities that are closely connected to the Temple. The first one is the priesthood and the second one is represented by the figure of the priest in God's Temple and by his worship.

Now, Jesus is not only God's Temple, but he is also the worship addressed to the Father. In His name, the Father accepts our worship and adoration. It is a worship in spirit and truth. Jesus mentions all this to the Samaritan woman as he talks about those who worship the Father in spirit and truth, whom the Father seeks at the time of his Messiah (John 4: 21-26). While talking about worship in spirit and truth, Jesus defines himself as the Priest of the Father, the true Melkisedek, who worships the Father in spirit and truth, day and night.

These three realities of our faith are accomplished in Jesus: being God's Temple in his humanity ; being the unique and high Priest of the Father in the Temple, according to Melkisedek; being the worship in spirit and truth of the Father, the great and unique God.

This is how Jesus worships and adores the Father.

In the theology of the Fathers of the Church, during the time of the great heresies denying either the Divinity of Jesus Christ or his incarnation, all the attention was focused at explaining the relationship between divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ. The result of these discussions was the dogma of Jesus, man-God, in whom two natures, divine and human, are joined, without confusion, in the person of the Word of the Father.

It is a holy and perfect theology, but it lacks to underscore another way of penetrating the person of Jesus, which is exactly what interests us here. The humanity of Jesus is joined to his Divinity in the person of the Word of the Father. But what is the relationship between these two realities? There are different aspects to this relationship, but what concerns us here is the relationship between the Temple and the Divinity that dwells in it, or, as Saint Paul affirms about the humanity of Jesus: "For in Christ the whole fullness of Deity (creator and supreme being) dwells bodily," (Col 2:9).

Our participation to the reality of Jesus, God's Temple, high Priest, and his worship to the Father.

Concerning the spirituality of God's Temple, us, it is very important to explore all the aspects revealing the humanity of Jesus: his being God's Temple; the unique and high Priest of the Father, his worship to the Father in spirit and truth.

In fact, when I write "us," I mean all Christians. We are all attracted by faith and grace, after having been purified of our sins and mystically united with the divine-human nature of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the vine and we are the living shoots. We are part of Him who is God's Temple, priest of the Father, who worships Him in spirit and truth, as Peter the apostle declares: "*And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*" (1 Pt 2:4-5). Notice how the three features of Christ are clearly mentioned and how they are accomplished by all the Christians who "come to him:" Jesus is God's Temple and we are his "living stones to build up a new spiritual house (as God's Temple)". Jesus is the unique and high priest of God's Temple and we are chosen "for a holy priesthood", in him and through him; Jesus worships the Father in spirit and truth and we worship the Father by "offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. "

What do you say, don't we have an incredible richness from which we can build a spirituality of God's Temple in our midst?