

***Third Sunday of Easter***  
***April 14, 2024***  
***Year of the Most Holy Eucharist***  
***Reflection #16***

*“At the start of the book of Leviticus, the Lord speaks to Moses from the tent of meeting and instructs him to pass on to the people the laws to do with the key act of worship—sacrifice, or offering.” (The Navarre Bible, Pentateuch, p.421)*

With our last reflection, I highlighted the story of the bronze serpent, comparing it to the crucifixion of Jesus, as a proof of the Truthfulness of God. Again, let me repeat the core point: God is Truth. His Words are Truth. He acts in Truth. And, His Words and Acts have a meaning for mankind based in His Truth. With this firmly fixed in our minds, let us re-examine Exodus chapter 25 concerning the building of the sanctuary (meeting tent, altars, ark, tabernacle, etc.) and contemplate its meaning. *“And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. According to all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.”* (Exodus 25:8-9).

We begin by asking the one-word question: “Why?” Why does God want the people to freely choose to offer those gifts which would allow for the construction of a sanctuary? This would seem to counter a later declaration He would make through the prophet Isaiah. *“Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house which you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?’”* (Isaiah 66:1). To reconcile this passage from Isaiah with the earlier passage from Exodus, we must take into consideration the historical context in which these words found in Isaiah were spoken. In Isaiah, the people had returned from exile in Babylon and discussions were underway concerning the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. God is wanting to remind them of an important lesson their fathers had forgotten which had ultimately led to their defeat and exile. The Temple and the Rites associated with worship of Him, lose their meaning IF they do not encourage the people to have a genuine humble devotion to His Words. This is not the case with the construction of the sanctuary found in Exodus.

To answer the question as to “Why” the construction of the sanctuary in Exodus, we must return to the Beginning, to the Garden. Man was created distinct from the Angels. They are solely spiritual beings. Man is a union of the spiritual and the material. This is the answer to the question “Why?”. It is the material which allows man to understand and relate to the spiritual. In essence, the material “Symbolizes” the spiritual thus allowing man to interact with God. An example of this interaction may be found on the hands of many who are married—their wedding ring. The ring is a symbol of the union of man and wife in marriage. If a husband or wife were to misplace their ring, would they still be married? Yes, because the ring is only a symbol of the marriage. The sanctuary and what it holds is a symbolic reminder of God’s abiding presence with His children. One may say, it helps the people to see and understand God who is unseen and unknowable. Furthermore, everything associated with the sanctuary creates an environment in which their daily lives find their meaning.

Why do some people, after purchasing a new home, spend an untold number of hours carefully choosing the colors and decor which will be found within? It is because these convey a meaning. The same was true with the sanctuary. Every sacred item, every decoration, each ritual, each sacrifice offered, every prayer uttered and even the smell of the incense conveyed a meaning. And, what is that meaning? In the beginning, when God created, everything He created was a harmonious union of praise to Him. In Eden, there was no sacred place nor rite of worship for all was worship. The actions of the Angels (those who did not fall) and the actions of Man, were all to be one continuous act of praise and thanksgiving. We were robbed of this union by the choice of our first parents. The construction of the sanctuary symbolizing God's presence with His people is itself only a symbol of a greater union between God and man which will take shape in the Incarnation. Alas, that is on the horizon and more ground must be prepared by God before we, mankind, can come to accept this.