

“Of Infinite Value.”

For lots of reasons, the Temple in Jerusalem was probably the most important building for first-century Jews; but mainly because it was the dwelling place of God on Earth. However, it took the eyes of faith to fully appreciate that fact.

In the year 70, the Roman army destroyed the Temple. However, when they approached the Temple, I suspect they only saw a building— an impressive building, perhaps even a beautiful building— but *only* a building. The Romans did not have the eyes of faith to see it as the dwelling place of God.

Now, the Temple’s destruction would have been a tragedy of immeasurable proportions for the people of God, if it weren’t for the fact that, many years before, God began working on a new temple, a new dwelling. And it would be a temple, as Mark’s gospel describes it, “not made with [human] hands” (Mark 14:58).

Sixty-three miles north of Jerusalem, in the village of Nazareth, a young woman had an encounter that not only changed *her* relationship with God, but which changed forever the relationship of *all people* to God. That young woman’s name was Mary, she was betrothed to a young man named Joseph, and you know the rest of their story.

However, when we read the story of Mary, we stand face-to-face with what seems to be a paradox. Let me explain.

We humans are almost obsessed with the notion of value. We want to get the most for our money. Whether we’re shopping for a car, or a house, or even an employee, we look for *something* or *someone* who will promise the best return on our investment.

Well, there was a time when I thought that God used similar standards in determining the value of each individual. And so, when I would read about how *Mary* was chosen to bear the Son of God— to be the temple, if you will, of the unborn Christ-child— I was stunned. After all, she was quite literally a *nobody* from *nowhere*. So, what was going on?

But eventually I came to realize that what happened to Mary was a foreshadowing of what God was going to do for *all* his people some 33 years later, on the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God was quickened within the hearts of those who had gathered.

In other words, the Day of Pentecost was God's announcement, and reminder, that his dwelling place on earth was no longer *only* the Temple in Jerusalem, but *also*— and, perhaps, especially— in the hearts of all his people. In fact, Saint Paul would later write these words:

“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?” (1st Corinthians 3:16)

And when the Temple was finally destroyed in the year 70, it became clear that the *only remaining* dwelling place for God, was within his people. In fact, it was the only dwelling place he *ever* needed, but it took the eyes of faith to see this.

Now, all this begs a couple of questions.

First, if the Jews so valued the Temple in Jerusalem because it was the dwelling place of God, shouldn't we also value *every other person around us*, because they too are the dwelling place of God as well?

And, second: How different would the world look, if we really took to heart the fact that everyone around us is the dwelling place of God's Spirit?

I think that what we need to take away from our readings from scripture is that, too often, we base our value judgments of other people on wrong the wrong criteria altogether. And that we need to employ our eyes of faith to recognize the startling fact— and perhaps for some it's a frightening fact— that, the way we treat others is the way we are treating God.

I know this is true, because towards the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus tells this parable:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd

separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me’” (Mt 25:31-45).

You and I are God’s temple. The dwelling place of God on earth is within each and every person you encounter. Therefore, we are valuable, *all of us*, because God, who is of infinite value, resides within us.

And the *Song of Mary*, which we recited a little while ago, is our song as well. And with Mary, we too can sing,

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me” (Luke 1:47-49a).

The Roman soldiers who destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, saw only a building. But those people who had the eyes of faith recognized it for what it was: the dwelling place of God.

In this world of ours today, we will encounter people will try to bring us down, people who will tell us that we don't matter. There may be days when we think that our value is next to nothing.

At those times, we need to remember that what God has *given* to us is greater than anything that anyone can *take* from us. For God has given himself to us; he has taken up residence within us. All of us.

The Temple in Jerusalem may have fallen, but the Temple of the Holy Spirit— that temple within our hearts— will stand firm for ever. And it is in that temple where we can seek God, *and find him*, and receive from him grace upon grace.

Amen.