

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT; Cycle – B; Dec. 24th 2023
2 Samuel 7:1- 5, 8b-12; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

We have just listened to a thought provoking reading from the second Book of Samuel. The key point of the reading is the message of God to David through Prophet Nathan. In order to understand it fully, we need to go back to the context of it. During the 40 years of Israel's life in the desert God also moved with them in the Ark of the Covenant and wherever they pitched the tent the Ark also rested in a tent. Even after the people settled down in the Promised Land they kept the Ark in a Tent. Finally, when David became the King of Israel, already 400 years passed between Joshua and King David. But still the Ark remained in a Tent, though people had their houses to live in.

In today's reading we see David having a little guilt feeling because, by this time he was living in a luxurious palace while Yahweh, the Lord, still stayed in the tent. So he expresses to Prophet Nathan his desire to build a Temple for God and Nathan too supported the idea. But God discarded this plan totally. Please listen to the words of God to David through Nathan, **“Thus says the Lord: Should you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day to the present, but I have been going about in a tent under cloth.”** These words of God spread light to a great truth that the Almighty God does not want to be contained in a big structure; rather would like to live among the ordinary people like one of them. David wanted to contain the Omnipresent and Almighty God in a manmade structure, thinking that God would be comfortable there.

God preferred to dwell in the tent for the very reason that he could be a lot closer to the ordinary people. God knew that living among the ordinary people in their level would help people to approach him with ease and comforts. Prophet Isaiah prophesied long before the birth of Jesus, **“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,”** which means **“God is with us.”** And Matthew repeats this prophecy in his gospel, while narrating the birth of Jesus. **As Matthew views, Jesus is going to be Emmanuel, that is, God is with us; not in a manmade structure.** Finally when Jesus was born, he didn't choose the palace of Herod or in the house of a rich Pharisee; rather he chose a manger, which always remained among the ordinary people. That is the very reason, the first visitors of Jesus happened to be the shepherds. Even his parents didn't belong to the elite class in the society. Jesus grew as an ordinary carpenter.

During his public ministry he moved from town to town, village to village; lived with the ordinary people; ate with the sinners; chose the outcast to be his disciples. He didn't have a house of his own to stay. Jesus says, "*Foxes have dens and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son Man has nowhere to rest his head.*" If God preferred to remain isolated in some place, he would not have come down from heaven as 'Emmanuel.' Only in Christianity we find God taking the form of an ordinary human being and coming down to live among the people. That is what John says in his gospel, "**And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us and we saw his glory (1:14).**"

Till in the fourth century there were no churches at all. Christians were in the hiding places and Jesus stayed with them. As the Church gained religious freedom huge churches were built in Rome and Europe, spending millions. You may have visited a few of such Basilicas. The religious leaders thought that Jesus would be pleased by these beautiful structures. Even this very day this same tendency is going on among the leaders. They have totally forgotten the very message of the Incarnation that he is Emmanuel, God is with us. Of course, we need a structure to gather for worship; but it should not be the symbol luxury.

Unfortunately, many Christians feel comfortable to shut down Jesus in a structure and come and pay him homage once a week or whenever it is convenient for them. After the Mass they say to Jesus, "*Hi Jesus, have a nice weekend and see you next week.*" They don't want him to go with them and get involved with their married life, family life or personal life. Of course, we cannot deny the truth that Jesus is present in our communal worship and liturgical celebrations, in the Eucharist and in the Word of God we proclaim at every Mass. But our worship in common should help us to keep Jesus in our hearts. Above all Jesus prefers to dwell among us. Our hearts are the best Temple we can open for him. When we go out of this House of God, after our communal worship, let us not leave Jesus here and go; rather let us take him with us and keep him with us. Let Jesus be part of our very activity.