

TO BE DEDICATED

1 Chronicles 29. 6-19

Ephesians 2. 19-22

John 2. 13-22

I speak to you in the name † of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

We may not realise it, but today we have the privilege of considering one of the most historic moments in the life of Israel. In 1 Chronicles 29, the spiritual life of Israel is at its peak; and for some time now, Israel's King David has had a vision. The Spirit of God has laid upon his heart a vision to build a great house for God, a place of worship that would replace the tabernacle, or tent of meeting that had been used by the Israelites up to that time.

This Temple that David wanted to build was, as the first verse of 1 Chronicles 29 puts it, a 'palatial structure'; it was to be far, far grander than the temporary place of worship that had been built by Moses when the Israelites were wandering in the desert. I do not of course wish to disparage the tabernacle of Moses, which had been impressive enough:¹ it had an outer court that was seventy-five feet wide by one hundred and fifty feet long; and the tent, or tabernacle, had walls of gold-covered acacia boards, and was divided into two rooms: the Holy Place, where the table of showbread, the golden lampstand, and the altar of incense were placed; and the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant resided. The presence of God dwelt with the Ark of the Covenant, and placed within the Ark were the stone tablets that had been given to Moses, a golden pot of manna, and the staff of Aaron.²

¹ Cf. Ex 25-27 and Ex 35-40.

² Cf. Heb 9. 4.

The purpose of Moses's tabernacle was to provide a place where the people could properly worship God. But the vision of the new Temple that the Spirit had given to King David was *more* than that of a place where people could properly worship; it was, as David said himself, a vision of a palatial structure that was '*not for man, but for the Lord God*'.

The Temple was to be a structure of imposing grandeur: not only would there be massive outer courts lined with walls of hewn stone, but also a glorious Temple built of stone. Its Holy Place would have walls lined with cedar, on which there would be carved figures of cherubim, palm-trees, and open flowers, all overlaid with gold. The floor of the Temple would be made of fir-wood, and overlaid with gold.³ The Holy of Holies would be floored and wainscoted with cedar from Lebanon; and its walls and floors would be overlaid with gold; and above the Ark of the Covenant, there would be two cherubim made of olive wood covered in gold, each nearly fifteen feet high and having outspread wings with a span matching their height.

You see, David's plan was to build a Temple that would be a *permanent* dwelling place for the Ark of the Covenant, where the presence of God dwelt. About one thousand years before our Lord was born, as soon as David had unified all Israel, he had brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, Israel's new capital. And he had even purchased a threshing floor⁴ for the site of the Temple. But unfortunately, despite David's wonderfully inspired plans for the Temple, we learn from an earlier chapter in 1 Chronicles⁵ that God had told David that the actual building of the Temple would be given to his son Solomon.

³ Cf. 1 Kings 6 and 8.

⁴ Cf. 1 Chr 21-22.

⁵ Cf. 1 Chr 28. 3.

So as our text opens, King David finds himself in the presence of all the officials of Israel who have assembled in Jerusalem. King David is now an old man. He knows that he does not have much longer to live, and he is about to transfer his royal sceptre to his son. Having received this wonderful vision for the future earthly dwelling place of God, David's final public act before he dies is to ask the community of faith to share in the cost of the building of the glorious new Temple. He asks them to give; and 1 Chronicles 29 is an inspiring story of God's people giving to God's work.

As we look at our text, we see that the people of God gave *willingly* (29. 6 and 29.9), because they recognised what a great God they served; they gave *generously* (29. 7-8), as they wanted to give back to God what was already his; and they gave *joyfully* (26. 9), because they wanted to show their thankfulness to God for all that he had done.

I would like to draw your attention to one final thing that characterised the giving of the people of God in our text: as they prepared to give, and in the very act of giving, they consecrated themselves. In the verse that immediately precedes the first verse of our text from 1 Chronicles 29, when David challenges his people to give towards the construction of the Temple, he says in verse 5: 'Now, who is willing to *consecrate himself* today to the Lord?'

When David asks if his people are willing to consecrate themselves to the Lord, he uses a Hebrew word (הִתְקַטַּל or *hitpael*) that may be translated as 'set yourselves apart' or 'prepare yourselves'. David was reminding his people that a vital part of giving to God is giving *ourselves to him*. God wants more than our gifts. He desires that we dedicate ourselves to him; that we decide afresh to serve him; that we be dedicated to his work and purposes.

This past week, I had the great privilege of leading a pilgrimage to the Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, near Norfolk in the UK. As you may know, people from different parishes in Guernsey (including the Town Church, the Vale Church and St Stephen's Church) decided to come on this pilgrimage so that they could spend time with God, listen to him, receive from him, and be refreshed by him. If I had the time to do so, I could go on and on about the wonderful experiences we shared together. We were truly blessed.

One of the many delights of the week was meeting the two priests who serve at Walsingham: Fr Graham Lunn, the Shrine Priest; and Fr Philip Barnes, the Priest Administrator, who will soon be replaced by Fr Kevin Smith. Under their leadership and direction, we pilgrims shared unforgettable moments in worship and prayer; we experienced awe-inspiring moments with the Sacraments; and we lived truly sacred moments when we knew that God was calling us to draw closer to him.

These things in themselves were wonderful enough; but an additional blessing was the privilege of seeing the deep, honest and sincere engagement of Fr Graham and Fr Philip. In spending time with them, and even in looking at them from afar, one had an unmistakable sense of their calling; one knew that they had 'set themselves apart'; and one saw that they have given themselves to the service of God. It was obvious. It was noticeable.

Today we do well to ask ourselves: when others look at us; and *yes, when God sees us*, is our dedication to him so apparent? And to push the point even further, does our dedication inspire others to draw closer to God? With the help of God, may this be so for you and for me. Amen.