

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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1 Kings 8:(1,6,10-11),22-30,41-43

NRSV

The Temple has been built, as David wished. In his time, the Ark was brought to Jerusalem after he conquered the city; it was placed in the “city of David” (v. 1), as it was then known, in the “tent of meeting” (v. 4). The Ark is now moved, in procession, to the Temple, to the Holy of Holies (“inner sanctuary”, v. 6). After the priests leave the Ark there, “a cloud filled the house of the Lord” (v. 10), a sign of God’s presence (v. 11). In vv. 12-21, Solomon addresses the people, declaring the continuity between God’s covenant with Israel during the exodus, his promise to David, and the Temple – God’s dwelling place among his people.

Vv. 22-53 are Solomon’s prayer of dedication (edited by a later hand, during the exile in Babylon.) Solomon asks God to keep his promise to David: that his lineage will continue forever if his descendants (“children”, v. 25) follow God’s ways as David did. The question in v. 27 is rhetorical, for the cloud is evidence of God’s presence. Omni-present as he is, God makes the Temple his earthly home. God’s “name” (v. 29) is symbolic of his presence. Solomon asks that God may always be attentive to prayer in the Temple, and “toward” (v. 30) it (from exile). The King asks God’s attention to his and the people’s “plea”, and gives seven illustrations: (1) by being just (v. 32); (2) when they “turn again” (v. 33) to him after God has punished their waywardness by having an enemy defeat them; (3) when he punishes them with drought (v. 35); (4) when he does so with famine and various plagues (v. 37); (5) to respond to a foreigner’s pleas when he or she seeks and finds the God of Israel (vv. 41-43) – so that people everywhere may know God and hold him in awe; (6) when they battle an enemy and pray for success; and (7) when they “come to their senses ... and repent” (v. 47) and seek freedom, after their sin has caused God to have them exiled. May God hear them, his chosen people – as he promised to Moses (v. 53).

Psalm 84

NRSV

This psalm praises God as the longed-for goal of the pilgrim. The “dwelling” of God is the Temple (and perhaps also the land of Israel). To live in the Temple is greatly to be desired: those who live there have security and happiness, even the birds (v. 3) who nest in the Temple area. Making a pilgrimage to the Temple offers these hopes. When the pilgrims pass through the arid “valley of Baca” (v. 6) en route to the Temple, it becomes fertile. They become more and more godly (“strength to strength”, v. 7) as they travel, increasing in their knowledge of God. V. 9 is a prayer for the king. (The word translated “anointed” is *messiah*; later it was taken as referring to the ideal future king who would restore the nation.) Perhaps v. 10 contrasts the fate of the godly and the *wicked*. God is both “sun and shield” (v. 11): he illuminates and protects, and bestows of blessings. (In Malachi

4:2 he is “sun”.) Life for those who trust in God is clearly superior.

Ephesians 6:10-20

NRSV

The author now concludes his letter. Earlier, he has prayed that his readers may come to know the power of God operative in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ to heaven, and in his victory over the forces of evil. The Church participates in that victory; its members know something of this power in their conversion: a *resurrection* from a fatalism that viewed the world as continually declining towards evil.

Now the author tells them that they must learn to rely on that power: they are to equip themselves with “armour” (vv. 11, 13) provided by God, as they oppose not people (“blood and flesh”, v. 12) but the malevolent forces (“rulers ... authorities”) which control them. The metaphor of the soldier is from Isaiah; here he is girded with “truth” (v. 14) and integrity (“righteousness”); his “shoes” (v. 15) give him firmer footing for (paradoxically) proclaiming the “gospel of peace”. His faith will protect him against attack from the devil (“the evil one”, v. 16). He accepts “salvation” (v. 17). He has one offensive weapon, given to him by the Spirit, “the word of God”. Persistent prayer, prompted by the Spirit, is his aid in interceding for fellow Christians (“saints”, v. 18). In vv. 19-20, the author asks his readers to pray for him that he may be given a gift of the right words in telling of the “mystery”, God’s age-long purpose, now disclosed, to call both Jews and Gentiles to share in Christ’s saving action. Paul is (like) a prisoner awaiting trial (“in chains”) yet is able to tell the good news “boldly” and freely.

John 6:56-69

NRSV

Jesus has said that he is divine and the *living bread*. Now he says that partaking in the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper, establishes a lasting relationship, a community of life, a mutual indwelling, between him and the believer. “Living Father” (v. 57) reminds us of “living bread” (v. 51): the Father sent the Son to give life, and the life the Son has is the Father’s, given to the Son; this type of relationship is extended to the partaker in the Eucharist. This bread is “from heaven” (v. 58) as was manna (“which your ancestors ate”), but it is much more effective: it is the eucharistic sacrament of life. Jesus now leaves the “synagogue” (v. 59).

Many of his followers find “this teaching” (v. 60) “difficult”, i.e. offensive: eating flesh is repugnant; he offends Jewish belief by claiming to be “from heaven” (v. 58) and to give life (only God can do that). Jesus says (v. 62): *if you can't accept these things, seeing me ascend to heaven will really confound you*. I speak spiritually, not literally (v. 63): “it is the spirit that gives life”, is the life-giving factor. Humanity, even Christ in human form, is “useless” without the spirit. Jesus’ words link life with spirit. Some, he says, do not believe, so the Eucharist is nonsense to them (v. 64). Belief in him is a gift from the Father (v. 65). This leads many to desert him (as later many left the Church, v. 66). Jesus offers the twelve the chance to leave him (v. 67). Peter replies on their behalf: we are on the way to knowing you, for we already believe in you; we know why you came (v. 69).