

Homily Caribbean Worship Sat Sept 26.15

Tonight we are celebrating our unity in Christ and our renovations to the sanctuary. We are praising God in the style of our new friends from the Caribbean, farm workers from Jamaica, and Trinidad and Barbados, whose hands have helped nurture and harvest literally tons of fruits and vegetables for many years in the fertile soil Clarington in Durham Region. We honour their work and the Lord who gives them strength to be away from their families and now to be part of our church family.

Sanctuary is a word derived from the Latin *sanctuarium*, which is like most words ending in *-arium*, a container for keeping something in—in this case holy things or perhaps holy people. The meaning was extended to places of holiness or safety. People seeking asylum from a foreign country or pursued by immigration officials sometimes hole up in a church claiming sanctuary.

A TV car ad shows a luxurious leather interior, lush music as the car speeds along and the words 'it's sanctuary'.

Sanctuary a container for holy things? The bible says in answer to Job's complaints, "Where were you when I founded the heavens and the earth?" Isaiah prophesies from the mind of God, "Even the wild animals are mine and the cattle on a thousand hills" and King Solomon's relevant question in 1 Kings 8:27 "But will God dwell on Earth? The heavens cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built?"

A container for the holy one? Not likely. God is wild and free and holy and good and beyond all we can imagine. YET, God makes covenant with Abraham and Sarah, promises a great nation through them and Isaac and Jacob and Moses who receives from the Holy One the law the 10 Commandments, for his people to live by. And God promises to be with them, first in the tent of meeting, the tabernacle and the temple, Solomon's magnificent structure we heard something about in 2 Chronicles bible reading and many years later after the first temple had been destroyed, King Herod's 46-year effort to build the second temple where Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers and dove sellers.

What is sanctuary for us as believers, especially since our St John's sanctuary has undergone renovation this summer?

This homily hopes to explore sanctuary as place, as purity, as people.

A teacher in a religion class asked his students what a homily was for them.

A first student answered that it was an explanation to the Gospel. Another said it was a commentary to a feast day celebration. A third said it was an occasion to stress moral teachings or doctrines of the Church.

One particular student struck the teacher as having the most promising answer when he said, "It's like medicine."

The teacher was intrigued. Hiding his amusement, he asked the student why he thought it so.

The student casually remarked, "Because a homily makes you well, but at the same time makes you feel drowsy."

In the Old Testament the word *miqdas* / "holy, " implying a distinction between space that is "sacred" versus "profane") commonly refers to the worship "sanctuary" (e.g., [Exod 25:8](#)), where the Israelites offered their various kinds of offerings and sacrifices to the Lord under the supervision of the priesthood. As in English, however, where the word "sanctuary" can sometimes refer to a "refuge, " there are two instances where the Lord refers to himself metaphorically as the "sanctuary" (i.e., refuge) of faithful Israelites in distress ([Isa 8:14](#) ; [Ezek 11:16](#)). The more abstract term *qodes* ("holiness, sacredness") also many times refers concretely to a "holy place" (e.g., [Exod 30:13](#)).

In the New Testament *hagios* [[a&gio](#)] (i.e., "holy [place]") means "sanctuary in nine instances, all in the Book of Hebrews. It also occurs three times as an adjective for the temple as the "holy place" of Israel ([Matt 24:15](#) ; [Acts 6:13](#) ; [21:28](#)).

Sanctuary as place: tent of meeting with God, a place of refuge

Rick Smith, was walking past St John's one Sunday morning along Temperance Street in order to hang himself at Rotary Park. As he walked past he heard in his mind his grandfather's voice, "If you're ever in trouble, go to church." Rick was in trouble. He found a warm

welcome when he walked in. Rick found sanctuary here and for the time he was with us, as many struggles as he had, he gave himself to God and God's work and loved helping wherever he could here at St. John's. When he died a few years ago, we wanted to remember him and so there is a little rock with his name on it in one of our flower gardens that I see each day as I come into Church. Sanctuary. Relief. Joy. Welcome. Service.

As above mentioned, sanctuary is also about purity. The place of meeting with a holy God meant following the elaborate practices of ritual slaughter of animals, whose blood was felt to be a substitute for the sins of humanity.

The Lord sanctified the sanctuary and with it an officiating "Aaronic priesthood" ([Exod 29:44](#) ; [Lev 8:10](#) ; [Num 7:1](#)). To the latter he assigned the responsibility of maintaining the sanctity of the Lord's presence in the sanctuary ([Leviticus 10:10-11](#) [Leviticus 10:17](#) ; [Num 18:1](#) ; [Deut 18:5](#)) lest the people "die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them" ([Lev 15:31](#)).

Because God was dealing with a sinful and unclean people who would inevitably defile the sanctuary, the Lord provided for its regular cleansing (see, e.g., the regular sin offering in [Lev 4:1-5:13](#)) as well as the annual cleansing and (re)sanctifying of the defiled sanctuary ([Lev 16:19](#)). Nevertheless, he warned that God would completely abandon his sanctuary if his covenant people abandoned God ([1 Kings 9:6-7](#) ; [2 Chron 7:20](#)), a threat he eventually acted upon.

Sanctuary as purity extends beyond the human realm.

The writer of Hebrews developed the theology of the "heavenly sanctuary" ([8:22](#)) as the model or "pattern" ([8:5](#)) of which the "earthly" and "man-made sanctuary" ([Hebrews 9:1](#) [Hebrews 9:24](#)) was only a "copy" ([9:23-24](#)). In the Old Testament earthly sanctuary there was a tabernacle (tent) or building in which there was an outer room called "the Holy Place" separated by a veil from an inner room called "the Most Holy Place, " which only the high priest could enter and even he only once a year. Jesus entered the "holy of holies" of the "heavenly" sanctuary for us ([9:25](#) ; cf. [8:1-5](#)) when he sacrificed his own body as our High Priest once for all ([9:24-25](#)). By this means he,

in fact, granted us direct access into the heavenly sanctuary and, indeed, the very presence of God ([10:19](#) ; cf. [4:14-16](#)).

Jesus' sacrifice makes it possible for us to enter not just St John's building but the holy place where God dwells. So as not to sound overly mystical, this notion of sanctuary as people comes from Jesus himself. The holy one chose to become human. Christ's sacrifice was in his body. His body was raised from the dead. Now, we as his people who his holy ways living in us. In a sense we are that sanctuary. St Paul writes, Therefore in urge you in view of God's mercy that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God. We are living, breathing, moving sanctuaries, a place of where holy dwells, where a pure life has been made possible because the sacrifice of the holy son of God. We are HIS people.

YET, here we go again, yet, the church as place as sanctuary needs a lot of work. It's a Senior citizen so to speak, built by English craftsmen who knew how to build things to last but she still needs rejuvenating. And we worked hard this summer to re-do the front section, chancel area and sanctuary of the church.

But if our point is Sanctuary is people not just a place, then I know I need renovating too, I need rejuvenating. Where do we begin?

Four steps:

1. excavate.

This summer with some wonderful help, I laid a stone walkway to the front of our house. I was tired of the weeds and the wonky, cracked concrete slabs. We began by excavating the grass and dirt. Man, weeds are persistent, as are my sins, my selfish ways. Thank God even more ruthless is the fierce love of God who will NOT let you and I go. Hebrews 9 says, If my people, who are called by my name – Christ – ians ! – humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” 2 Chronicles 7:14

This is weed pulling, excavating the bad stuff, being aware of attitudes and actions that we may cling to but that are not holy, not pure, not going to help us make progress with God.

Maybe there is some bitterness about past church stuff, maybe about marriage matters or family troubles. Pull up the weeds, excavate the trouble, give it to God. As Jesus humbled himself so too do we need to humble ourselves.

Two: pray. God I give it to you. Talk to Him. We certainly talked over our stone walkway for a long time til Dianne was getting tired of me talking about it and finally did something. When talking to God you might say, "I'm tired of carrying it alone." That's a prayer or however you wish to say it. Don't miss the chance to give it to God. Pray.

Three; seek my face. It's funny how what we watch, what we spend our time looking at, what we fix our heart on, has a way of being reflected in our lips, our lives, our choices. I must have spent hundreds of hours looking at other people's driveways and walkways as I was thinking about our project. It took time. Seek God's face takes time but He's worth it and see what new places, new purity, new people that takes you. We reached out to the migrant workers and who would have guessed WE would be blessed by these guys, by the Lord.

4. turn from wicked ways. Make a solid base – we used A gravel, tamped down with machines called Hand tamper and Jumping Jack. Jesus has laid a way, having paid for our wicked ways. Even my flesh and feeble mind fail and my shaky resolve needs shoring up, as does the ship of faith. His word is true. It will accomplish that which it was sent out to do. Jesus is the rock of my salvation. We are forgiven and given another chance to walk in faith.

Chris Blatchly called me this summer. Chris was someone I knew years ago when I was in theological college. He seemed interested in knowing more about the claims of Christ so we met for a number of lunches in his parents apartment in Toronto. After a few weeks' discussion when he told me his life's view, I was doubtful if the message had gotten through. Lo and behold, 30 some years later he calls me from Boston to ask a question and tells me my efforts had not been in vain, that he had become a believer in Christ and had married, had two children and was in a successful insurance company and regular worshipper at a church in New England USA.

Great victory is ours in the sanctuary of our lives, in the sanctuary of heaven as we walk in obedience. St Paul wrote, "Do you not know

that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you? God's temple is holy and you are that temple." 1 Cor 3:16, 17

You know, it's funny how my first major house project mirrored the same summer as what happened here at St John's a project more than a decade in the making.

My sense is that God's not finished. The work in progress is not just our building; it's us. Am I right? God's renovating our place, our purity, us as people. The sanctuary, the refuge you might find in here, in God may not actually be solely for your benefit, your calm, your sense of place. Maybe the sanctuary you sense that lives in you by faith, is a steadying presence THROUGH you to someone else.

Our theme has been the unity we know in Christ, that his sacrifice has fulfilled centuries of earlier sacrifices that people then and now might know they themselves are the dwelling place of a holy God, not that we worship ourselves but the one who dwells both within and beyond us, the one to whom we humble ourselves, pray, seek his face and turn from past patterns of wickedness to living, loving, liberating God.

God limits God's self in such a way that people can experience something of the shakina glory, the awesome majesty of God on earth.

Thanks be to God.

Pray