

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

Where is God? It's a common question. It's especially common in times of hardship or trouble—where was God? Where was God in the Parkland, Florida shooting, people wonder, and many lash out: “We don't want your thoughts and prayers. We don't want your moments of silence while you do nothing.” A Daily News cover in 2015 after the mass shooting in California read: “God Isn't Fixing This.”

Where is God? We learn in our catechisms that God is everywhere. The big catechism word here is “omnipresent.” “*Where shall I go from your Spirit?*” David asks. “*Where shall I flee from your presence?*” In heaven or in the grave, David confesses, “*you are there*” (Psalm 139:7-8)! Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord affirms: “*Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD*” (Jer. 23:23-24).

Where is God? We surely affirm that the omnipotent God is omnipresent. But maybe the better question is “Where is God for me?”

Israel of old knew where to look for God. They looked first to the mountain as the Lord gave Moses the commandments for the Lord had said to Moses: “*Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you ...*” (Ex. 19:9). But upon his descent, besides giving them the Ten Commandments, Moses instructed the people on making the tabernacle, and from then on, that's where they looked for God. When the cloud descended upon the tabernacle, they knew that the Lord had come (Ex. 33:9). They knew that the Lord had come to the Most Holy Place to sit on the mercy seat of God (Lev. 16:2).

Even later when the permanent temple replaced the tabernacle, Israel still knew: this was where the Lord could be found. This was the place to come to offer up their sacrifices to the Lord: sin offerings and guilt offerings, burnt offerings and peace offerings. This was where they came to have sins atoned for and to be made right with the Lord. This was the Father's house — the dwelling place of God. “*How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts,*” the psalmist sings (Ps. 84:1).

But in our Gospel, on this day, not in a cloud, but in the flesh, the Lord came suddenly to His temple, and those in the temple courts could not “*endure the day of his coming*” (Mal. 3:1-2). Like one filled with “*a refiner's fire*” and like one armed with “*fullers' soap,*” Jesus came to cleanse the temple. He drove out all those who were selling “*oxen and sheep and pigeons*” for the sacrifices that were but shadows of the sacrifice that the Lord Himself would offer. He overturned the tables of money — gold and silver no longer needed for the temple tax, but rather gifts offered up without compulsion, cheerfully given in response to “*the*

*surpassing grace of God*” in Christ Jesus, “*offerings [made] in righteousness to the LORD*” (Mal. 3:3) to Jesus.

Indeed, Jesus comes to the temple to tell us that He is the true temple of God; indeed, more specific than that, He is the sanctuary, the Holy Place, the place where God comes to dwell. Jesus fulfills the word of the Lord through the prophet Ezekiel: “*I ... will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God*” (Eze. 37:23). “*I ... will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*” (Eze. 37:26-7).

This sanctuary is Jesus. The stone temple — Solomon’s temple, Nehemiah’s temple, Herod’s temple, like the tabernacle before them — was but a temporary place for God to come down from heaven and dwell among the people. They sufficed until the true temple came down from His heavenly abode and became flesh—which is exactly what happened in the Son’s incarnation. God came down from heaven and tabernacled with mankind in Jesus.

And so as Jesus entered the stone temple, one soon to be destroyed utterly, “*not ... one stone [left] upon another that will not be thrown down*” (Mark 13:2), He instructed the Jews no longer to look to this temple as the place to encounter God. Look rather to the temple that would be destroyed and raised back up again in three days. As scandalous as it might sound to Jews, as foolish as it might sound to Greeks, look to Jesus Himself, to the Christ who would be “destroyed” on the wood of the cross and die, but who would live again in three days, raised up in resurrection victory. Look to Christ, though low and despised as He hung from the cross, now raised up, and ascended, and reigning, and holding all things together by His Divine power and wisdom (Col. 1:17).

Where is God? God dwells in His temple, and that’s Jesus. It’s to Jesus that we look to see God. When we look to Jesus, we see the unseen God (John 1:18; John 14:7).

And it’s particularly here as we gather as church that we encounter Him. Whether in the waters of Holy Baptism wherein we were incorporated into Him — into the mystical body of Jesus — or by hearing Jesus’ own words or the words of “*the apostles and prophets*” (Eph. 2:20) that call us to faith in Him, we not only encounter God, but we are ourselves being built into a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling place for God (Eph. 2:21-2).

So that, now, when you, who have been made God’s dwelling place, come to hear Jesus’ word or receive His holy Sacrament, you are coming to the temple to encounter God. Whenever you gather, two or three in Jesus’ name, to hear His word of cross and forgiveness preached, to partake of His resurrected body and

blood in the sacrament given for your forgiveness and life, you are meeting Jesus, the dwelling place of God, and God comes to dwell ever more in you.

And to be sure, in this life, you will struggle with sin; you will struggle to keep God's holy ten commands; you will struggle with crosses that come your way; you will struggle with the holiness that marks God's temple. Yet you know that "*in Christ Jesus*" you are also that temple, and the "*righteousness and sanctification and redemption*" that He won for you are yours. You have an extrinsic holiness that enables you to offer up "*spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*" (1 Pet. 2:5).

So where is God? The world wants to know, and you know the answer. God dwells in His temple. Where is God? God is found in Jesus, destroyed and raised up again. Where is God? God is here for Jesus comes where people gather in His name. Where is God? God is here for this is Christ's body, the church. Where is God? God is here in the Word purely preached, in Trinitarian waters that flow from the font, in bread and wine that feed us Jesus' true body and blood. Where is God? Though we see it imperfectly, God is found in each of us, God's temples filled with the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16).

We know it; may others see it and give glory to the Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). Yes, God grant us all lives of holiness that proclaim to the world that "*Surely the LORD is in this place...*" (Gen. 28:16).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.