



Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (November 10, 2024)

A good replica of a work of art is nice to look at and enjoy but it's not the original and the feeling is not the same. The replica is still a copy of somebody else's artistic creation; it may be a close rendition of the original, but the artist's soul is not there, and it is, therefore, not "original," not as valuable. It's a reproduction that makes one long for the real thing. It's cheaper but the attraction is not there, and it becomes dispensable.

In Hebrews 9, Christ enters heaven, a sanctuary "not made with human hands."¹ The temple (or church) where we worship isn't the real sanctuary at all, but merely a "copy" of the heavenly sanctuary: we are sitting in a room that is a replica, an imitation of heaven, where worship goes on now and will forever.²

Our sanctuary is a paradise on earth. So, we treat the room, and those in the room with us, very differently and with respect, finding ourselves together in this copy or replica of heaven.

Even our worship on earth reflects the heavenly worship of the Church Triumphant. We are connected in faith to our ancestors, who see the living God face to face and offer praises with us to the great "I Am." God is the recipient of our laud and honor, not we. We don't worship ourselves but the One who is worthy.³

¹ Heb 9:24. Check Paul's 2 Cor. 5:1 where the body, your "earthly tent," will become a "house" in the heavens.

² Check Revelation 4.

³ Revelation 4:11

Are we humbled by this notion? Are we intimidated? How do we sit knowing we are in the presence of God and the saints of God? Do we tremble? Do we fear? What is our attitude? What do we experience? Are we even aware of what is happening or is our worship a thoughtless habit?

Next to you, in the presence of God, sit people just like you and me with personal challenges, questions, fears, doubts, hopes and regrets. People we may like or not. Still, people we are called to love. People who strive to be honest, genuine, and sincere in their attempt to follow Christ; people who suffer, carry their load, experience loss and grief, and happy moments as well.

People who also make mistakes, are stubborn, judge, criticize, and blame others; people who seek their self-interest and try to save their skin when in trouble; people who at times seem careless, lazy, and indifferent to other people's suffering; people who do the least required and put up a good show; people who come across bossy, cold, and altogether unattractive.

And as I judge them that way, I am back in my own arrogance and self-righteousness. I see the uncomfortable speck in the other's eye and don't see the ugly log in mine.⁴ I pat myself on the back because I don't see myself like them.⁵

And yet, God allows us all in God's presence, to worship, to sing, and to raise prayers in our collective voice, made one in the Spirit. The prophets tell us that God frowns upon hypocrisy and lip service.⁶ Yet, God is patient and merciful, slow to anger and kind-hearted, granting us time and space to grow.

⁴ Matthew 7:3-5

⁵ Do you remember the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector? See Luke 18:9-14.

⁶ Isaiah 29:13; Jeremiah 3:10; Matthew 15:8

How does this sound to us worshippers the Sunday after the election? Whether your candidate and your party has won or lost, be mindful of Who it is we worship, Who it is who creates, and Who it is who saves. With the words of the poet, we say:

The Lord is my protector;
he is my strong fortress.

My God is my protection,
and with him I am safe.

He protects me like a shield;
he defends me and keeps me safe. (Psalm 18:2)⁷

In Spirit, God is involved in our transformation, and we stand and rejoice in God's presence, justified and beautified, shoulder to shoulder with all the saints who have preceded us.

Because of Christ, God sees a perfect Church. Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ we receive God's blessings and look at the world with compassion and kind-heartedness. We hope and trust God is at work making new things even when it is hard for us to see.

Knowing all that, how can we hold judgmental thoughts about neighbors we don't like and disapprove of? How can we refuse to listen to one another, to try to understand, to honor each other's dignity, to respect other people's opinion, to work together, and to plan for a better and safe future for all?

The sanctuary we worship in is but a replica of heaven. Yet, the Spirit of the Divine Artist is with us. Let us allow that Spirit to transform our lives. Amen.

⁷ Good News Translation