

## From **The Life of Christ**

By Bishop Fulton J Sheen

....but everyone was curious about Him. He immediately became the source of division. Those who were attracted kept quiet for fear of the temple authorities, who had already plotted His death. The Jews were looking for Him at the feast, And asked, Where can He be? Among the crowd, there was much whispering about Him

Some said, He is a good man; No, said others, He leads the multitude astray. But, for fear of the Jews, Nobody dared to speak of Him openly. John 7:11-13

The Feast of Tabernacles, as it was said, commemorated the place where the Divine Presence dwelt among the Jews during their long pilgrimage from Egypt. And now here in the midst of the crowds stood the Divine Presence in Person.

And the Word was made flesh And came to dwell amongst us. John 1:14

The Greek word "to dwell" in the Gospel could equally be translated "to be tabernacled" and is thus suggestive of the Tabernacle placed in the center of the tents of the Israelites. Christ was the Tabernacle of God among men.

The Jewish Targums often substituted for the phrase "glory of the Lord," the word Sheekinah or "dwelling," thus indicating God's intimate sojourn with His people. Those at the feast remembered that Our Lord had called Himself the "Temple of God," and prophesied that it would be destroyed but on the third day would rise again. That they intended to destroy this Temple of the Tabernacled God among them was evident, as some of the people of the city asked:

Is not this The Man they design to put to death? John 7:26

The procession celebrating the feast started from the temple. When it reached the pool of Siloe, the priest filled his golden pitcher from its waters and returned to the temple, where the water was poured out with a burst of trumpets amidst the "alleluias" of the people. It was so much associated with joy that a common saying declared that "He who has not seen the rejoicing at the pouring of the water from the pool of Siloe has never seen rejoicing in his life." The ceremony was not only an acknowledgment of the mercy of God in watering their fields, but also a commemoration of the miraculous supply of water in the desert, which came from the rock. At the moment the water was offered by the priest in the temple the words of Isaias were quoted:

So rejoicing, you shall drink deep From the fountain of deliverance. Isaias 12:3

Our Lord, Who said that He had come not to destroy the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them, now spoke out to affirm that He was the substance of which these rites were but dim shadows. His voice rang out above the pouring of the waters as He said:

If any man is thirsty, let him come to me,  
And drink; yes if a man believe in Me,  
As the Scripture says, Fountains of living water  
Shall flow from His bosom. John 7:37, 38

He was bidding them recall their Scriptures. In Exodus God commanded Moses to smite the rock, promising that out of it water would come from which the people would drink. All through the Old Testament, water was the symbol of spiritual blessing, particularly in Ezechiel, where a mighty fountain is described as flowing from the Tabernacle or temple, healing all nations. The Fountain of Life for thirsty souls, He now declared, is His own Person. He did not say, "Come to waters," but "Come to Me." The Talmud asked about this ceremony, "Why is the name of it called the drawing of the water?" Because of the pouring-out of the Holy Spirit, according to what is said, "With joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation." St. John explained in the same way the words of Our Lord:

He was speaking here of the Spirit,  
Which was to be received by those  
Who learned to believe in Him;  
The Spirit which had not yet been given to men,  
Because Jesus had not yet been raised to glory. John 7:39

The satisfaction of the thirst of the human heart was joined up with the work of the Spirit. Our Lord was looking forward to the production of a blessing conditioned by what had not yet happened, namely, His triumph over death and His Ascension into heaven. This gift of the Spirit would come to men not as a magical outpouring, but as something intrinsic to His Redemptive Act and their faith in Him. The physical presence of Christ on earth in His yet unfulfilled mandate of the Father to be a ransom for sin excluded the realization of His Presence in souls until after His glory and the sending of His Spirit.

Another ritual connected with the Feast of the Tabernacles was in reference to the pillar of fire which had guided the Israelites by night. To celebrate the light which God was to them, two immense candelabra were lighted in the Court of the Women; and according to some Rabbinic testimony, they illumined all Jerusalem. The people had looked forward also to Messianic times when God would kindle for them a great light among the nations. The light also signified the glory of God which was present in the temple.

When Our Blessed Lord was a Babe held by Simeon, the old man had pronounced over Him these words:

This is the Light which shall give revelation To the Gentiles,  
This is the glory of thy people Israel. Luke 2:32  
Now as a grown man walking in the full glare of these lights, He proclaimed:  
I am the Light of the World,  
He who follows Me can never walk in darkness; He will possess the Light which is Life. John 8:12

Here He made a universal claim such as had been prophesied by Isaias that He would be the Light of all peoples and all nations. Not everyone would follow the Light; some would prefer to walk in darkness and would therefore hate the light. He Who was standing in the temple in which the lights were gradually dimming proclaimed Himself the Light of the World. Previously, He had called Himself the Temple; now He affirmed that He is the Glory and the Light of that Temple. He was declaring Himself more necessary for the life of souls than the light of the sun is for the life of our body. It was not His doctrine, nor His law, nor His commandments, nor His teaching, that constituted this light; *it was His Person*.

In the midst of Our Lord's affirmation that He was the Messiah, there began some of the judicial and civil measures which were later to culminate in the Crucifixion. The Pharisees sent police officers to arrest Our Lord. Before they arrived, Our Lord made another reference to His death:

For a little while I am still with you,  
And then I am to go back to Him Who sent Me. You will look for Me,  
But you will not be able to find Me;  
You cannot reach the place where I am. John 7:33-34

He foresaw all that would happen. Six months remained until the Passover; there was only a little time left before He would fulfill the reason of His coming. They were already planning His death, but their plans would be unsuccessful until He delivered Himself voluntarily into their hands. Then the door would be shut and the time of their visitation would have passed. The separation between them and Him would not be distance but unlikeness in mind and heart, which is the greatest of all distance.

The police who were ordered to arrest Him returned to the chief priests and Pharisees empty-handed. The officials asked them:

"Why have you not brought Him here?" The officers answered,  
"Nobody has ever spoken as this Man speaks." And the Pharisees answered,  
"Have you, too, let yourselves be deceived? Have any of the rulers come to believe in Him yet,

Or of the Pharisees?  
As for these common folk who have no knowledge of the law,  
A curse is on them." John 7:46-49

The temple officials had contempt for the people; their assumption was that no vulgar person is pious. The very fact that the policemen had an overwhelming impression made upon them and yielded themselves to His fountains of benediction was an indication of the power He had over men of good will. The vocation of a policeman was sanctified that day when these officers refused to arrest the Savior.

There would be another moment in the Garden of Gethsemane when officers would be so impressed with Our Blessed Lord that they would cast themselves prone on the ground, when He said that He was Jesus of Nazareth. On that night, they would have their way because His Hour had come. But for the present they were powerless.

The story of the Feast of Tabernacles ends with the words, "His Hour has not yet come." A particular hour existed for everything He had to do; even His birth is described as the "fullness of time." So His Cross had its appointed hour. Every orb that rolls through the immensity of space is bound to reach a certain point at its own hour. Alan's decrees and proposals often fail, but it is otherwise with the designs of the Almighty. The unity of His life was not in His scattered deeds and parables and utterances, but in Its consummation.

Bethlehem was the foundation of Calvary and His glory. The stairs mount upward from the stable, for even then "there was no room" for Him; the "contradiction" prophesied by Simeon was another step; the Feast of the Tabernacles, another. He knew every step of the way, for He was not merely a man doing his best before God, but *God doing His best for man*, through the Love revealed in the sacrifice of Himself.